


MAC'S ADVENTURES



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MAC'S ADVENTURES

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BY
JANE BARLOW

AUTHOR OF "IRISH IDYLLS," "BOGLAND STUDIES"
"IRISH NEIGHBOURS," ETC.



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TO THE MEMORY OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE
I INSCRIBE THESE STORIES

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A LUNCHEON PARTY	I
A FORMIDABLE RIVAL	25
MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS	51
SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY	91
A WEDDING GOWN	125
THE FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS	199
THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES	243
AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS	275

A LUNCHEON PARTY

A Luncheon Party

MRS. DEMPSEY often declared that the little young gentleman had more sense than the pair of them rolled into one; not, she added, that that was saying any great things for him. The people of whose intellectual capacity she implied this humble opinion were Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Barry, who had spent part of a summer in her lodgings at Inverallen, a small seaside place; the other person referred to was Mac, their only child. Although he was not yet four years old, he had already experienced some considerable vicissitudes of fortune, which nobody would have anticipated when first he saw the light. For at the time of his parents' marriage, Lily Sinclair had seemed a wealthy match for the youngest son of a not over well-to-do peer, her father's affairs being so prosperous that Valentine Barry's wish to invest in the business the money left him by his mother looked quite reasonable, and Lord Ballyduff's objection merely a piece of contrariness. As Valentine

MAC'S ADVENTURES

had just come of age, his purpose could not be absolutely vetoed, and his persistence in carrying it out led to a complete estrangement between himself and his father. This was the more regrettable because a year or two afterwards some sudden commercial crisis engulfed in hopeless ruin the bulk of the Sinclairs' possessions, so that the Valentine Barrys were reduced to very narrow circumstances indeed. Their prospects were made even gloomier by the fact that Lord Ballyduff, who had the name of being a harsh and implacable man, now behaved in full accordance with his reputation, making no advances whatever towards his distressed kin. Perhaps he hardly realised the extent of their disaster. Pride, on the other hand, caused Valentine to keep rigidly aloof from the intolerable *I told you so*, as became a rejecter of warnings, which the event had cruelly justified.

By the time that with his wife and family he arrived rather aimlessly at Inverallen, their financial position had become decidedly embarrassing, their resources, originally very small, having been further diminished by unthrifty mismanagement. They had always hitherto lived with Mrs. Valentine's people, so that now at two-and-twenty she was almost as

A LUNCHEON PARTY

ignorant about domestic economy as she had been when she married five years before, and her husband had never any turn for practical affairs. Nobody could have much intercourse with them without becoming aware of this incompetence. It betrayed itself very clearly during a call which she received one day from the two Miss Tolertons.

The Miss Tolertons were elderly ladies of Quaker antecedents, who had lately come to Inverallen, and who had already made the acquaintance of little Mac Barry. One fine afternoon they had gone down as usual to the beach with their novels and knitting, to sit in a favourite nook among the hollows and slopes of the bent-grown sand hillocks, sheltered from the sun and wind, and beyond the range of damp seaweed and jelly-fish. On this occasion their books were *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, both in a railway library series, but with the flaunting yellow covers concealed under sober brown paper, for the sake of example, since, as Miss Nannie said : " Though we, of course, would never choose anything objectionable, still, at a little distance we might *look* as if we were reading Ouida, or worse." So they always hid their gaudy pasteboards discreetly, and felt a mixture of virtue and

MAC'S ADVENTURES

hypocrisy if they saw any one glancing towards their volumes.

Their camping-ground was not far from the mouth of a short, deep-rutted lane that ran down between the sand-hills to the shore, and for some time they had it entirely to themselves, barring the presence of a few sand-hoppers, who danced among the tufts of sea-holly and long spikes of bent. But after a while a small form came to the entrance of their hollow, and squatted down full in their view. This was a child, a little boy, seemingly between three and four years old, dressed in a faded brown-holland suit, so very pale of hue that it had evidently, they thought, gone through many washings in the tubs of a laundress who did not know how a handful of bran in the water keeps the colour to the last thread. He had fair, glossy hair, not long, but growing in soft fluffs, half wave, half curl, and shrewd-looking dark blue eyes in a little round face, which was browned by the sun, as were also his small, well-shaped hands. He brought with him a large wooden spade, rather badly broken, and a round tin canister, which he was filling with what pebbles and shells occasionally cropped up through the sand. Most industriously did he carry on this pur-

A LUNCHEON PARTY

suit, only pausing now and then to rattle his treasures with an air of solemn satisfaction.

Miss Nannie being extremely fond of children, her thoughts naturally enough turned at once towards their paper bag of biscuits, a compromise between sloth and greed, intended to diminish the void left by the absence of five o'clock tea, foregone as not worth the walk to and from their lodgings. She now extracted two sugary biscuits and offered them to the new-comer with a friendly smile, which generally inspired confidence in the youthful mind. But he glanced first at her, and then at her proffered gift with an imperturbable though slightly bored air, as of one who meets with an interruption which must be civilly yet firmly put aside.

"Hate 'em, thanks," he said with deliberation and distinctness, and thereupon resumed his occupation of grubbing up a preternaturally large cockle.

"Ah, you like shells better than biscuits, I see," said Miss Nannie, not to be repulsed, albeit somewhat disconcerted by the laconic decision of this refusal.

"'Spose so," he answered without looking up.

"You wouldn't like them, though, for your

MAC'S ADVENTURES

dinner—come now, would you ? ” she went on playfully ; but in reply to her little sally he only murmured to himself a few words, which sounded like “ Bodder,” and “ talking great nonsense,” and “ wish to goodness.”

“ They would feel very hard and gritty, wouldn't they ? ” she continued, sportively enlarging upon the idea ; “ and I think you would soon wish for some nice broth and soft bread instead of them.”

To this suggestion he made no direct reply whatever. Only after a short pause he gave a deep sigh, almost a gasp, and said as if soliloquising, but in a loud, complaining tone :

“ 'Clare it's a poor case that no one can *ever* let a Person alone for a single minute.”

Here was a snub too signal to be disregarded. Miss Nannie retired, quite taken aback, to her seat, and her would-not-be acquaintance continued his employment in the unmolested tranquillity which he had succeeded in securing for himself. He was not destined, however, long to enjoy it without further interruption. Before many minutes had passed he heard an approaching voice call “ Mac, Mac ! ” and presently the caller appeared round the corner of the bank—a tall, slight slip of a girl, who looked about twenty, the old ladies thought,

A LUNCHEON PARTY

dressed like the child in faded holland, and with the same soft-hued hair, a few shades darker, and a face scarcely less sun-browned than his own. Having outgrown the spade-and-shell period, however, she carried a book in one hand, and a shady hat in the other.

"Oh, there you are, Mac," she said as she came in sight of him. "I've been looking for you for some time. I didn't see which way you went."

Mac, who was sitting with his back to her, did not look round, but said, "Well, *I'm* not going home now, anyway, so you may be off, old Lil."

"But see here," she said, standing still and using an argumentative tone, as if expostulating with a grown-up person, "I forgot to order dinner this morning, and if I don't go soon, I suppose it will be too late to have anything cooked."

"*I* dunno, I'm sure," responded Mac with chilling indifference.

"It wouldn't take long. You'd have plenty of time to finish when we come back," said Lil; "and I'd make as much haste as I could."

Mac preserved a stony silence. Then, as she was drawing nearer, he, still without looking up, flirted a small shower of sand in her direc-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

tion with his spade. Some of it went into her neatly buckled little shoes, and she at once began to retreat with a slightly crestfallen and aggrieved air.

"I suppose Val is somewhere about," she murmured to herself as she turned away, glancing up and down the beach before she vanished into the lane.

Mac now moved a little nearer to the Miss Tolertons, attracted by the sight of several desirable pebbles, and Miss Nannie could not forbear to seize so good an opportunity for a timely remonstrance.

"Don't you think, my dear," she said, "that you ought to go with your sister, when she wants you?"

Mac looked at her with a scornful wonder. "She isn't my sister," he said; "she's the *misthress*," pronouncing the last word in a way which showed that he was accustomed to hear it spoken by some uncultivated person, presumably his nursery-maid. A sudden idea flashed across the old ladies' minds. Miss Nannie wondered, in a rather horrified whisper, "whether it was possible that that girlish-looking thing could be his mother." And, now that they thought of it, they remembered having heard that a young married couple had

A LUNCHEON PARTY

taken the red-brick house close by at the other end of the lane.

They were still shaking their heads over the lamentable laxness of discipline indicated by the child's mode of addressing his parent, when a third stranger appeared on the scene. This was a tall young man in light grey, who, as far as they could see—for he had not come very near, and yet so near that they did not like to put on their spectacles—was dark and good-looking, and who certainly was smoking a cigar as he sauntered along. At sight of him Mac evinced more interest than he had hitherto condescended to display. He gathered up his spade and canister and ran off in the direction of the now receding figure, which soon, finding that he did not gain upon it as rapidly as he could wish, he hailed peremptorily with, "'Top, Val; can't you wait for one? I'm a-comin' with you."

"Val!" the Miss Tolertons repeated to one another, and added with a simultaneous groan, "His father!"

Val stopped as directed, and then even retraced a few steps slowly. "Oh, you Mac, be off now," he said in an injured sort of way, his tone being a less resolute and more melancholy edition of that used by Mac himself shortly

MAC'S ADVENTURES

before. "You aren't coming with me, you know. You gabble so all the while that a man can't get any good of his smoke."

Mac took no notice of this accusation, but proceeded to stuff his canister, for which he had not any further use at present, into a convenient pocket of his friend's coat, and then shouldered his large spade.

"I'm going a tremendous way," said Val, indicating magnificent distances on the horizon with a sweep of his arm, "you'll never be able to walk so far."

But Mac merely remarked, "Come 'long," and the pair departed, Mac achieving a length of stride truly wonderful, considering the inches of his legs, though at times a tendency to topple over compelled him to steady himself by abrupt clutches at his companion's coat, which somewhat marred the dignity of his progress.

Next day the Miss Tolertons learned very thoroughly who Mac and his belongings were, as when once the rector's wife had mentioned that these sojourners at Inverallen were the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Barry, and that he was the youngest son of Lord Ballyduff, the old ladies immediately found themselves possessed of much further informa-

A LUNCHEON PARTY

tion. Valentine's mother had, in fact, been an old school friend of theirs, and they well remembered him in the character of a fat, jolly baby, upon the visit which they had paid her not long before her early death. Since then they had seen little of the family, but common friends had kept them duly conversant with the main course of affairs. Thus they knew about Valentine's marriage, and his quarrel with his father, and the failure of his father-in-law's speculations. The news of this catastrophe had at the time caused them considerable chagrin, for poor Maude Armitage's sake, especially as in view of the strained relations existing between Valentine and unamiable Lord Ballyduff, the young couple seemed likely to be left badly off. Their appearance now in this unfashionable resort, and, as Miss Nannie observed, evidently in last summer's clothes, might be considered, she opined, to betoken limited means; and that impression had something to do with the sisters' resolve to lose no time in calling upon them, notwithstanding their reprehensible conduct in bringing up their child to order them about, and address them by their Christian names.

Martello Lodge was a commonplace little villa residence, which had been run up on

MAC'S ADVENTURES

speculation when the railway reached Inverallen, and which had since that time been generally unoccupied except by the elderly charwoman, who was let with it as an excellent plain cook. Still, having had some experience of the rents demanded for similar seaside dwellings, the Miss Tolertons said to one another, as they sat on cheap chairs in the shabby, showily furnished drawing-room, while the maid looked for her mistress, that the Barrys could not be so very badly off after all, if they could afford to take a house like this.

Mrs. Barry presently appeared, accompanied by Mac, who shook hands with the callers with a preoccupied air, and straightway immersed himself in an old volume of *Punch*. His mother was very pink with shyness through all her sun-brown, but soon grew very friendly through all her shyness, when she found that her visitors were such old acquaintances of her husband. As the conversation proceeded, she might have been observed screwing up her courage to start a subject on her own account ; but it was not until Miss Rachel had begun momentarily to expect Miss Nannie's signal for departure, that their hostess ventured to inquire timidly whether they knew of any

A LUNCHEON PARTY

lodgings to be let in the neighbourhood. "This house does quite well, really," she said, "only that eight pounds a month seems a good deal to pay just for rent, when one has not more than about a hundred a year, doesn't it?" she continued, looking appealingly at her guests. "You see, if it went on for long there wouldn't be much left for anything else—and there are such a quantity of other things."

Considerably shocked and startled at this disclosure, which revealed a deplorable scantiness of resources, together with a reckless non-adjustment of expenditure thereto, the Miss Tolertons confirmed Mrs. Barry's opinion so emphatically that she looked rather alarmed.

"You see," she said apologetically, "I never did any housekeeping until we came here, as my mother looked after everything at home, and I don't know much about it, and neither does Val. But we settled this morning that it would be better to move at the end of our month."

Fortunately the Miss Tolertons had heard only that day that Mrs. Dempsey's lodgers had left her. Mrs. Dempsey's lodgings were a little way further up the road towards Portarne, and judging by the appearance of her lodgers, her charges seemed unlikely to be high. So it was arranged that the sisters should next morn-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

ing accompany Mrs. Barry on a visit of inspection, since, as they afterwards remarked, it appeared most improbable that she would make a good bargain if left to conduct the negotiations alone.

Mac took very little notice of them during their visit, but that little was not, as might have been apprehended, of a hostile nature. Miss Rachel, chancing to sit near him, was on her guard against irritating him by any obtrusive advances, and once, having noticed him glance several times from his book to her, and finally remark aloud: "The name of this picter is so 'trociously printed that nobody could possibly read it who hadn't got spectacles on"—she had the presence of mind to fall in with his views by availing herself of her equipment with those articles to read out, as if for her own satisfaction, the illegible line, the typography of which was indeed in no way at fault; whereupon he said, "Oh, that's it, is it?" in a tone of studied indifference, and turned over another page.

Miss Nannie, less tactful, did not come off quite so well. When they took leave, she had the indiscretion to address Mac, who stood by, looking very small, and misleadingly meek, as "my lamb." He appeared to reflect pro-

A LUNCHEON PARTY

foundly for a few moments, and then, eyeing her sternly, said, "When a Person has got all the parts of a human bein', I don't see *how* he could be anybody's lamb." A rebuke which she could but accept.

By the end of the week the Barrys had moved into Mrs. Dempsey's lodgings, thus considerably diminishing the uneconomic disproportion between house-rent and income, and making it possible to dispense with the services of their housemaid, who, as Mrs. Barry confided to her new acquaintances, they fancied was perhaps not strictly honest, a conjecture which her hearers entertained all the more easily when they learned that she had been hurriedly engaged in Dublin, without any inquiries as to character. After this the summer slipped by, not bringing much intercourse between the Tolertons and the Barrys. The young people evidently had a decided preference for keeping themselves to themselves, and though at incidental meetings they were always pleasant and friendly in manner, they obviously avoided all such encounters. Their own observations led the Miss Tolertons to explain this by the unsatisfactory state of the little household's finances. For as time went on they thought that its two elders began

MAC'S ADVENTURES

to wear a somewhat harassed and dejected look; and the surmise was strengthened by remarks which fell from Mac, who favoured the sisters with a good deal of conversation when they met him on the sands.

For instance, one day, having pointed out to them the large holes which appeared in the upper leathers of his small shoes, he went on to remark, "Lil says they're 'sgraceful, but we haven't got a shilling to spare, and she's given up gloves, and Val says it's a confounded nuisance being so tight." And on another occasion, in reference to the same subject, which evidently was a serious grievance to him, because, as he complained, "old stones and things came pwicking into his stockings," he observed, "It's a bovver that Lil's bwoaches and bracelets are losted, for Val says that we could have raised up something for them. And," he added solemnly, "he and I has our s'picions that that girl Lizzie ab-abstracted most of them." Moreover, after a while it was noticeable that he no longer despised even the plainest biscuits, but would eat them with an avidity and eagerness which caused misgivings as to the quantity and quality of the child's meals at home.

So things went on until about the middle

A LUNCHEON PARTY

of September, when there were to be races at Baypoint, the next station to Inverallen, three miles distant, or less, if you took the shortest way along the sands. Newspapers announced that two of Lord Ballyduff's horses were to run, a circumstance which drew from the Miss Tolertons much mournful speculation about "the sums that man must be spending on his stables, at a time when his nearest and—one would have supposed—his dearest were positively almost in want of the necessaries of life."

On the morning after the races Miss Rachel went down, as it happened, to the shore alone, and took up a slightly elevated position on a sunny bank, from which she commanded a view of the wide stretch of beach to either hand. She had not been there long when she saw Mac trot out of the lane, bearing his usual load of wooden spade and tin canister. His first proceeding, however, was an unusual one, for pausing close by the sand-bank, he laid down his spade and began with evident difficulty to extract something from his canister. This proved to be a large doubled-up slice of bread and butter, which his strong sense of propriety had no doubt hindered him from consuming on the road, and of which, to judge by his hasty movements, he now

MAC'S ADVENTURES

proposed to make short work. But before he had time to indent more than one notched semicircle on its smoothly spread surface, his attention was diverted by the arrival of a beautiful red setter, who came pattering noiselessly over the sands on his silken-fringed feet, and took his stand before Mac, swaying a feathery tail, and surveying the child open-mouthed with a blandly expectant expression of countenance. Being fond of all manner of four-footed creatures, Mac addressed the animal, whose head was almost on a level with his own, in patronising and encouraging accents.

“Poor little doggie!” he said, “would he eat some bread and butter?” and, suiting the action to the word, he broke off a crumbly fragment, the extreme smallness of which was, as is the case with many a charitable deed, prescribed by his own urgent necessities rather than by his generous impulses, and proffered it to the gently smiling jaws before him. The manners of their owner were, however, sadly unfinished, and he saw no reason why he should be bound to prefer the right hand to the left, especially when the latter obviously held the materials for so much more satisfactory a mouthful. And the consequence was that the next moment there occurred a rapid snatch,

A LUNCHEON PARTY

an indignant squawk, and a hurried gulp, after which Mac's ample slice had vanished for ever, while the cause of its disappearance resumed his expectant attitude, innocently blinking and licking his lips, and making tremulous shadows on the sand with his swiftly vibrating tail.

"You nasty, gweedy old thing," said Mac in high wrath, striking at the dog with his spade. "You knowed as well as I did that you weren't to have it all. 'Clare it's too bad that I can't even have my bit of food in peace."

At this moment the dog's master, an elderly gentleman, stern of aspect, and with a grizzled beard, whom Miss Rachel had for some time seen approaching from the direction of Bay-point, came up to the place, and, not being aware of the bread-and-butter incident, naturally enough mistook the cause of Mac's perturbation.

"You needn't mind him, my man," he said reassuringly; "he's as quiet as a lamb—wouldn't think of touching anybody. Hi! Rufus, come here, old fellow."

This was indeed adding insult to injury. Mac turned upon him with intense wrath.

"I'm not afraid of him any more than you are yourself," he averred in a high shrill voice.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"But how'd you like it if he went and ate up every scrap of your lunching on you, and you starving with the hunger?" (Mac, as some of his friends were pained to observe, had, since his residence under Mrs. Dempsey's roof, picked up several of her idioms.)

"I say, that's too bad," replied the stranger; "but you don't live far off, I suppose. Couldn't you run home and get some more?"

"And where'd be the use of going home," Mac said bitterly, "when we couldn't 'ford to get more than one loaf yesterday, and it was all finished up at breakfast this morning? And there won't be no more till the baker-man comes this evening. And Val and Lil can't have *any* lunching; but the lodging-woman gave me a piece, and she said it was a poor case if a gentleman's son, let alone, as she'd heard tell, a nobleman's grandson, couldn't have a bit of bread when he wanted it. And now that nasty idiot"—aiming another blow at Rufus, who was still affably grinning—"has went and swallowed it all up before I could stop him."

"Just tell me what's your name," interposed the stranger abruptly, his grim smile of amusement having suddenly vanished.

As Mac was rather proud of his name, which is long and not very easy to pronounce,

A LUNCHEON PARTY

he promptly replied, "Macartney Valentine O'Neill Barry," adding, "What's yours?" in a tone which clearly challenged competition.

His hearer said simply, "The devil!" Then, recollecting himself, he answered hurriedly, "My name? Oh, well, it's much the same as yours. Do you know where your father is? Look here, if you'll show me where you're staying, I think I can see about getting you some luncheon."

"All wight; this way," said Mac, and he preceded the other up the lane. But they apparently met some one before they had gone far, for a moment afterwards Miss Rachel, who was eavesdropping with all her ears, heard Val's voice exclaim, "The governor, by Jove!" thus establishing the truth of her conjecture that Mac had been making the acquaintance of his paternal grandfather.

She returned home anticipating great things from this meeting. And her hopes were certainly to some extent fulfilled, inasmuch as it led to a complete reconciliation between Lord Ballyduff and the Valentine Barrys, whose financial difficulties were thenceforward at an end, and whose habit it became to spend a good deal of their time with him at Rathbawn Castle. The Miss Tolertons, however, had

MAC'S ADVENTURES

further trusted that under his grandfather's roof Mac would not only enjoy holeless shoes and unstinted bread and butter, but also the advantage of being taught more seemly reverence for his elders than when he was under the sole management of those irresponsible young people Valentine and Lily. And this particular hope was somewhat dashed on the last occasion when they saw anything of the child. It was a few days before he left Inverdrum, and they met him posting along the beach in a great hurry.

"I'm going to meet Val's governor," he explained. "He's to bring me a new spade from Baypoint, 'cause I've losted my broken old one. By Joves, I see him coming." And he ran on calling, "Duffy, Duffy!"

But presently they heard his grandfather's voice saying apologetically, and in a conscience-stricken tone, "Oh, upon my word, Mac, I declare I've forgotten the spade after all. What are we to do now? I say, couldn't you dig a bit with my walking-stick? You could make rather fine holes with it, I should think."

And Mac answered coldly, "Well, s'pose I can try. . . . Wonder you *like* to have such a bad membership."

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

A Formidable Rival

EARLY in the autumn following that interrupted luncheon on Inverallen strand, Mac Barry arrived with his parents at Rathbawn Castle, County Sligo, a gloomy old house which was much enlivened by their coming. Lord Ballyduff often lived there quite alone, his other sons being settled in England, and his daughters not uncommonly absent on long visits to less remotely situated friends. The Valentine Barrys, when not oppressed by pecuniary cares, were cheerful young folks, rather unpractical and happy-go-lucky, and in some ways curiously boyish and girlish for a couple of five years' standing. In fact, Mac was by far the most formidable person of the three, taking life *au grand sérieux*, as people do at the age of four, not yet having discovered that intermediate state between sleeping and waking and liking and hating, in which they afterwards are prone to spend so much of their time. There is no such word as indifference in a child's vocabulary.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Mac was at this period of his life both old-fashioned and original, his one great ambition being to maintain on all occasions what he considered a dignified and decorous demeanour—an ambition which really had the effect of a stern self-discipline, counterbalancing the spoiling process carried on passively by his parents, and now more actively by his grandfather and an ancient family nurse. He tried so very hard to do all that, in his opinion, might become a man, that his inevitable childish lapses were quaint and almost pathetic to witness. This turn of mind made him rather huffy and stand-off in his manner to possibly derisive strangers, and he generally showed a prudent circumspection about forming new acquaintances. As it happened, however, his nearest neighbours at Rathbawn speedily found favour in his sight. They were his grandfather's kinsman Dr. Longfield and his wife, at whose house, close to the Castle gate, he became a frequent caller, particularly after the arrival there on a visit of the Doctor's nieces, Amy and Beatrice Longfield, an event which, as will be seen, was a tolerably immediate consequence of Mac's own presence at Rathbawn.

The Longfield girls were the orphan daughters of the Doctor's brother Dick, and were

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

afflicted with a stepmother, not, upon the whole, in an aggravated form, as matters had been complicated by no second family, and Mrs. Longfield was really fond of the sisters, and kind to them, according to her not very brilliant lights. But it was unlucky that her solicitude for their welfare should have taken shape in an ardent and singularly undisguised desire to see them what she called "settled." This desire, which she sought to fulfil by such clumsy and transparent devices as made the proceedings a sort of burlesque of those adopted by more adroit manœuvrers, sprang from no selfish motive or wish to get rid of her charge, the fact that a large portion of their income would die with her being the main root of her anxiety. And, after all, many girls would have been ready enough to second her most strenuous efforts. Her stepdaughters, however, took a different view of things, rebelling against her little devices, and thwarting her best-laid plans in a way which only a fund of genuine good-humour could have borne without exhaustion. Thus it came to pass that all their uncle's invitations to Alpha and Beta, as the girls were nicknamed, had hitherto met with a firm refusal, the want of "opportunities" at a dull little out-of-the-way place like Rathbawn being

MAC'S ADVENTURES

frankly alleged as a reason of which nobody could fail to see the force.

But now, when a week or so after Mac's appearance at the Castle, business having brought the Doctor to Dublin, he called upon his sister-in-law in her quarters at a fashionable sea-side resort, and, though entertaining small hope of success, hinted that he would much like to bring his nieces home with him, Mrs. Longfield, to his surprise, after her first instinctive impulse to refuse as usual, seemed favourably disposed towards the suggestion.

"Carry off the girls to Rathbawn? I'm sure it's very kind of you and Louisa, but I hardly think—I don't really know. . . . Of course, it must be very nice for you to have the Valentine Barrys at the Castle. I suppose they make it quite gay, and will be likely to have other people staying there. And then, as a connection of the family, you naturally see a great deal of them? . . . Alpha certainly hasn't been looking as well as I could wish lately, and I dare say change of air *would* do her good. . . . Did you say that they have a grown-up son? How time flies! . . . Somebody told me that old Lord Ballyduff has heaps of money that he can leave to any one he likes. . . . I really don't think there will be much more

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

going on here now ; the season seems to be quite over, and Mr. Saunders is off to Scotland on Thursday, so they would lose nothing that way. . . . I'm sure, Denis, the girls will be delighted. They must see about some respectable evening dresses though, if they are likely to dine at the Castle. You'll enjoy a visit to your Uncle Denis, won't you, girls ? ”

“ As a stepping-stone to higher things we shall try to tolerate him,” Beta said with sarcasm.

A few days later, accordingly, the Doctor and his nieces started for Rathbawn. Mrs. Longfield saw them off with much kindly fuss, indulging to the last moment in hopeful forecasts and speculations, which were quite unchecked by either Alpha's unresponsiveness or Beta's outspoken snubs, and which their uncle was careful not to discourage.

“ My love to Louisa,” she called shrilly as the cab drove away ; “ and I'll let you know at once when Mr. Saunders comes back.” Whereat Beta put up the window on her side with a resentful jerk.

Mr. Saunders was a junior partner in a flourishing brewery firm, and throughout the past summer had been the bane of Beta's life, availing himself of Mrs. Longfield's zealous co-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

operation to inflict his unwelcome society upon her with much persistence. This Dr. Longfield gathered from Beta one day when he and she took a long walk, in the course of which he learned many particulars about the annoyances caused by her stepmother's crude and inexpert scheming. Beta related these with some humorous chagrin. "It's worse for me than for Alpha at present," she said in conclusion, "as I believe mamma is really beginning to despair about her, and lets her alone more. She is nearly twenty-three, you know ; four years older than I am."

"I suppose it is her venerable age that makes her so quiet and sedate," observed the Doctor.

"Oh, Alpha was born like that ; she has always been just the same, I believe," said Beta ; "though, having been so long away at the French school, I haven't seen very much of her until within the last year or two. Sometimes I should like to shake her a little, but then sometimes I fancy she isn't very strong. However, I think she has been livelier since we came here. Mac amuses her."

These sisters were not at all like one another. Alpha, tall and fair, was the prettier of the two, but so exceedingly silent and listless that when you had further described her as gentle

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

and sweet-tempered, you had very nearly summed up the general effect of the impression which she produced on her neighbours. Nearly, yet not quite, because there was still something scarcely definable in her, now and then coming to the surface in a witty saying or arch look, which seemed to betoken the existence of latent spirit and humour, held in abeyance by the torpedo-like spell of languor and absent-mindedness. Beta, on the contrary, was a small, dark, vivacious person, not exactly pretty, but pleasant and popular, and blessed with a keen sense of the absurd. Altogether she might have been thought likely to prove a more congenial child's companion than her sister; but this was not so in the case of little Mac Barry, who from the first showed a marked preference for Alpha. Children who are at all precocious, indeed, often do incline to shrink from the jocularities of their elders, despising it when it takes the imbecile form deemed appropriate to the infant mind, and dreading it when its subject is incomprehensible enough to leave scope for mortifying suspicions. Doubtless, therefore, it was Alpha's gravity in part that attracted Mac. He liked well enough to romp with Beta; but it was to Alpha that he brought hot, tightly compressed bunches of

MAC'S ADVENTURES

the blossoms, chiefly dandelions and ragweed, which he met with on his way from the Castle to the Grange, and it was her company that he sought when he went to play in the pine-grove at the back of the house, usually receiving offers of other society with plaintive requests not to "bovver," and intentionally audible asides about the hardship of never being left in peace for a single instant. A small stream ran through the grove, and in those fine autumn days Alpha's grey gown and little fur cape were often to be seen on its needle-strewn bank, as she sat with a book between the roots of an old tree, while Mac dabbled blissfully close by, beneath the brim of a straw hat many sizes too large for him, in fact a forced loan from his father.

This had gone on for about a fortnight, when one morning Dr. Longfield was accosted by Beta in high glee, with an open letter in her hand. "Oh, Uncle Denis, I've had such a delicious letter from mamma," she said, laughing. "When I wrote to her last, I must have said something about Alpha and Mac, for she has evidently taken it into her head that he is grown-up and highly eligible from her particular point of view; so I needn't say that she is in great delight. It's rather disgusting, of course, but really amusing, and as it happens

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

very convenient just now, for that detestable Mr. Saunders will be coming back directly, and I know that mamma would thereupon want to drag us home immediately, if she hadn't some other reason for keeping us here. My word, Uncle Denis, what a letter I will concoct to-morrow ! She shall have mentally ordered the trousseau before she has read it through. It's lucky that I am the one that always writes, for Alpha, who is frightfully conscientious, might think it wrong. As it is, it's perfectly fair, and I'm sure that I shall be able to keep mamma's mind quite at rest for as long as ever you will let us stay."

On the next morning, accordingly, Miss Beta did concoct a letter, upon which she prided herself not a little, and the progress of which she triumphantly reported to her uncle, as he chanced to be the only person present during its composition.

"I am managing splendidly," she said, "and really without inventing anything. It comes in quite naturally—like this" (reading): "'I am glad that you get such nice flowers from Glenwood. Mac Barry brought Alpha some splendid ones yesterday, as he often does' (they certainly were remarkably fine dandelions). 'I am sure she would send you her love only

MAC'S ADVENTURES

that she went out with Mac after breakfast ' (of course there is no need to mention that he was going to sail some paper boats, which she had made for him, in the little river), ' and has not yet returned.' " At last, laying down her pen, she exclaimed joyfully : " There, that's done. I wanted to put in something that would prevent her from making any allusions when she writes, as I can't suppress all her letters, as I did the last. I think this postscript ought to do : ' You had better say nothing about this when you write, as Alpha might not like it ' (I'm pretty sure that she wouldn't, but it's her own fault for being so lazy as to leave all the correspondence to me), ' and if any gossip comes to Mac's ears, I do not know how he might take it, for, to tell you the truth, I think he is rather easily affronted.' (That *is* true, at any rate. Why, only yesterday he called me a detestful idiot, and said that he would like to knock my hideous head off, because I pretended to think that he was afraid of Corkscrew's kitten. I almost wish that I had any prospect of so refreshingly candid and complimentary a brother-in-law."

This disingenuous communication had apparently the desired result, as Beta told her uncle that Mrs. Longfield's next letter was

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

“tolerably discreet for mamma,” containing nothing worse than a few mysterious sentences, while, even when reporting the imminent return of Mr. Saunders, it strongly urged the advisability of the girls remaining at Rathbawn. Here Alpha came into the room, and Beta quickly changed the subject, addressing her sister: “Mamma says in her letter that the other day a Captain Falconer called, and that you saw a good deal of him in Wicklow one summer three or four years ago, before I left school. He has just come back from India, having got some appointment in England. She says: ‘I was out when he called, but afterwards met him on the Esplanade. He has grown much older-looking. He asked after Alpha, and I told him how she had gone to the West, *where she might probably remain a long time.*’” A discontented pucker in Beta’s brow assured her uncle that these last words were meaningly underlined, and from his own knowledge of his sister-in-law’s capacity for keeping her thoughts to herself, he augured that Captain Falconer had most likely received some broad hints touching Alpha’s brilliant prospects. Alpha, meanwhile, had been gazing intently through the window, and she now held out a hand for the letter without taking

MAC'S ADVENTURES

the trouble to look round. She was very slow about the reading of it, and afterwards seemed more dreamy and indifferent than usual, being, it may be, perplexed by the ambiguities of which Beta had spoken.

One afternoon, a few days later, Dr. Longfield was hastening home from a long professional round, in hopes of escaping a threatened downpour, the first big drops of which had already begun to plump around him, when, not far from his gate, he met Mac stumping along quite alone, wearing a portentously solemn expression, and carrying an enormous Prayer Book.

"Hallo, Mac!" he said, pulling up, surprised at seeing the child on the road unaccompanied, "where are you off to?"

"To church," said Mac in an elaborately matter-of-course manner.

It should be observed that public worship still had for him the fleeting charm of a very new experience.

"To church, Mac? Why, this is only Thursday."

"Of *course* it's Thursday" (with an air of forbearing disdain), "but isn't there goin' to be a spechical service at five o'clock for Christian young men? Wasn't it gaved out on

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

Sunday evenin' ? B'lieve you heard it yourself."

"Well, but look here, Master Mac," said the Doctor, "I'm sure you must have come out without leave ; they'd never have let you set off all alone, and on such a wet day too." He might have added, "and by no means in church-going trim," for Mac's clothes showed marked traces of a recent paddling in the burn. Upon recognising a tone of remonstrance, Mac immediately planted his feet extraordinarily wide apart, and clutched his big book more firmly.

"I declare to goodness," he began with high-piping volubility, "it's a scandalous pity that nobody can ever leave off boverin' me. Stoppin' one on the road, and keepin' one late, when one's in a hurry on a beau'ful fine day. S'pose a Person mayn't even go to church now in peace, when there's a spech——"

But at this moment there came a sudden flurry of rain, accompanied by a violent gust of wind, which went roaring through the boughs above, and unceremoniously snatched off the Christian young man's broad-brimmed hat as it passed, besides nearly taking him off his feet. He, in trying to retain his headgear, let his new Prayer Book drop face downwards

MAC'S ADVENTURES

into a puddle, thereby splashing himself considerably with muddy water—a concatenation of disasters which so dashed his spirits for the moment that he was easily persuaded to be set on the car and driven home with Dr. Longfield, who despatched a passing groom to the Castle with news of the child's whereabouts.

In the little back drawing-room at the Grange a cheerful turf fire was glowing. Before this they two established themselves, and, made drowsy by the warmth after the chilly damp out of doors, Mac presently fell fast asleep on the rug, with his Prayer Book, open at the Communion Service, which had suffered most severely from the immersion, laid upon the fender-stool to dry. They had not been long there, and Dr. Longfield was himself beginning to feel rather sleepy, when he was roused by the announcement of a visitor, a Captain Falconer, whose name somehow seemed familiar to him, though in what connection he could not at first remember. Through the half-open folding-doors he could see that the new-comer was tall, thin, and apparently about thirty-five, with a keen, sun-burnt face, and dark hair already somewhat grizzled; plain, the Doctor thought, but pleasant-looking.

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

Despite this qualified approval, however, sloth prevailed over the promptings of hospitality and induced him to remain *perdu* in his comfortable corner, leaving his wife, who had been alone in the front room, to receive the stranger, and sustain the burden of making conversation. It threatened to be an uphill task, as Captain Falconer was manifestly embarrassed, and stammered nervously in explaining the reason of his visit. Happening to be in the neighbourhood, he said, he had ventured to call, as he had the pleasure of Miss Longfield's acquaintance, and her mother had mentioned that she was at the Grange. He was staying in the village at the "Ballyduff Arms"—a delectable sojourn, Dr. Longfield thought, judging by the exterior of that grimy hostelry—having run down from Dublin in hopes of some shooting—no, he meant of some salmon-fishing.

"It's getting rather late for that, is it not?" observed his hostess.

"Oh, yes, certainly; quite too late," he replied, with the exaggerated emphasis which people are prone to use when assenting to a proposition the terms of which they have failed to catch; and the eavesdropper could see that his attention had been completely

MAC'S ADVENTURES

distracted by the sound of a footstep just then approaching the door. It was Beta who entered, and neither she nor Captain Falconer could be congratulated on the success with which they dissembled, on the one hand dismay, and on the other disappointment. After a minute or two, she slipped into the back room, and, under cover of five o'clock teacups, which were clattering close by, whispered to her uncle her wishes that their visitor would speedily depart, "For," said she, "I have all manner of things to do to my pink grenadine"—there was to be a dance at the Castle that night—"and I wanted Aunt Louisa to help me. I think I might as well, at any rate, go and send Alpha down; he's her acquaintance, you know, not mine; and, besides that, I dare say he wouldn't stay long if she came, for she generally won't take the trouble to talk much to anybody."

So saying, she stole noiselessly away, on these hospitable thoughts intent. But as she went out at one door, Alpha entered at the other.

"I have come for Mac's flowers," she began. "I think I left what he brought me this morning on the table here, and if he——"

She broke off with a violent start, which her quick recovery and composed greeting could

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

not altogether conceal, but which it was less difficult to account for than to understand why Captain Falconer's countenance, so perceptibly brightened up at her appearance, should have clouded over so swiftly when she announced her errand. Her presence did but little to brush the surface of the languidly flowing discourse, which continued to trickle on feebly and intermittently, especially after her aunt had been called away by a mysterious message from the cook, leaving Alpha and Captain Falconer to a *tête-à-tête*. Their conversation proceeded somewhat in this fashion :

"What a warm summer we have had ! But I'm afraid the fine weather has quite broken up."

"I'm afraid so. This is a most disagreeable day out of doors—so showery and windy."

"It is, I am sure ; but I was only out for a few minutes early this morning with Mac Barry." (A pause.)

"I suppose this is a very quiet place. There seem to be so few houses about it that you can't have many neighbours."

"Very quiet indeed. We seldom have a visitor except Mac ; we see a great deal of him."

"Oh. So I supposed from what Mrs. Longfield said."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"Yes; he is a particular favourite of my aunt's. She will miss him dreadfully when he goes."

"Very fortunate for him" (Grimly. Then eagerly): "Is he going *soon*?"

"Oh, I don't think so; most likely about the same time that we do." (A longer pause.)

"Shall you make any stay in this part of the world, Captain Falconer?"

"I don't exactly know, Miss Longfield. I've been offered a rather good appointment in England, but I'm doubtful that I should care to take it. The chances apparently are that I shall be off to the East again before the winter."

Here Alpha drew towards her a piece of crimson wool-work, it would be unfair to assert with the express purpose of dropping the appended ball under the table and stooping to pick up the same, though as a matter of fact she did so immediately.

"You will excuse my going on with my knitting," she said. "I so much want to have this comforter finished by next week, in time for Mac's birthday."

"Oh, indeed," followed by a shockingly long pause, during which Captain Falconer, absently fiddling with a little bunch of weedy

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

and withered blossoms lying on the table near him, inadvertently brushed some of them over the edge. Whereupon: "Those are Mac's flowers," said Alpha, thankfully grasping at any straw of incident as material for remark. "I had intended to put them in water."

"I must apologise for maltreating so valuable a possession as *Mac's flowers*," Captain Falconer said sarcastically, picking up two dead daisies and a dandelion, and replacing them on the table with ostentatious care.

"Mr. Macartney Barry's," said Alpha, laughing nervously, and clinging to the subject from the instinct that leads people to talk about such things as children and animals when ill at ease; "you don't know what a dignified person he is, or you wouldn't speak of him so unceremoniously."

"Oh, I can assure you that I haven't the slightest wish to outrage Mr. Barry's feelings by any undue familiarity on my part," he replied with such excessive stiffness and sullenness that nobody who had not seen his face could have imagined him to be in earnest.

As for Alpha, she was perhaps at that moment hardly collected enough to notice the strange reception of her little jest. Her hands trembled among her bright wools, and her

MAC'S ADVENTURES

colour was coming and going in a way that betokened a perilous strain on her self-possession. Probably she was conscious of this, for she added hurriedly: "I rather fancied that I heard his voice in the hall a little while ago, and if he came in then, it must have been in the middle of that tremendously heavy shower. If you will excuse me for a minute, I should like to see——"

"Pray don't let me detain you," said Captain Falconer, rising abruptly. "Indeed, I have already stayed an unconscionable time, and no doubt you have an engagement."

"Oh, no, indeed I have not," said Alpha, rising too, and now evidently struck by his strange manner. "It is only that Mac takes cold rather easily, and if he sits in his wet shoes——"

"Oh, certainly, certainly; I quite understand," he began, but stopped short, interrupted by a sound which at this moment penetrated from the inner room. It was that of a voice saying murmurously and low: "Bovveration—it's too bad—they aren't a bit wet—old plagues—I'll not change them." Mac had, in fact, wakened just in time to overhear Alpha's last words, and somewhat to the lurking Doctor's consternation, seemed disposed to resent them deeply.

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

"They're perfittly dry, so they are. 'Clare to goodness it's plague, plague, plague from mornin' till night. S'pose you think one has nuffin to do but change one's boots every minute, when one didn't walk into a single puddle—can tell you I won't."

These remarks, begun in a drowsily defiant croak, rose in a shrill crescendo, and, as they ended, a small figure appeared between the folding-doors, and stood blinking its dark blue eyes irately into the lamp-lit room.

"Why, Mac," said Alpha, "I never knew that you were in there."

"They're as dry as boneses," pursued Mac, not to be diverted from his grievance, and protruding a muddy boot-tip. "Can't you ever let a Person be? Wish to goodness people would sometimes mind their own business. Dare say *his* old boots" (glowering at Captain Falconer) "is twice as wet as mine all the while—and I won't bring you daisies and danglinlions ever any more again, Miss Alpha." Wherewith he retreated triumphant, and betook himself to his rug.

"So that's Mac," said Captain Falconer excitedly; "but—not the Mac Barry, surely, that you were speaking of just now, and that your mother told me so much about?"

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"He's the only Mac Barry I ever heard of," said Alpha, looking much puzzled at his astonishment. Then, as he continued to ejaculate, "Is it possible?" she added: "What is there so wonderful in that? Why shouldn't he be?"

"I don't know—exactly," he stammered. "I must have made a mistake somehow. For your mother—I understood her to say that he was in the army."

"What can mamma have been thinking of?" said Alpha. "Of course, she never saw him; but it sounds too absurd—in the army! A child not four years old!"

The position of an eavesdropper is never in itself an honourable one, though it may sometimes be thrust upon a man by circumstances which absolve him from blame. No ordinary circumstances, however, can justify him in revealing what thus may come to his ears; and there are occasions upon which his doing so would be regarded by right-minded people as an unpardonable sin. Acting on this principle, Dr. Longfield kept strictly to himself all the observations that passed between Captain Falconer and Alpha, during the few minutes which elapsed before he thought it expedient stealthily to withdraw.

But when, after a long interval, Captain

A FORMIDABLE RIVAL

Falconer having at last departed, and all the women-folk being deep in confabulation upstairs, the Doctor went to fetch Mac to his tea, he could not forbear saying to the child in an aimless sort of semi-soliloquy: "Well, Mac, it seems that you have been the hero of a small tragi-comedy"—a remark which Mac apparently considered to be of an opprobrious nature, for, condescending to a *tu quoque*, as he certainly would not have done, had he been wide awake, he retorted sleepily: "So're you."

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

Mac's Ways and Means

MAC BARRY said that he wished he had a steam-yacht, a hunter, a rifle, and a pound; if he had those, he wouldn't want anything else. A pound was the largest sum that the financial experiences of nearly six years enabled him to imagine himself as owning, and he considered that it would be quite adequate to the maintenance of the rifle, the hunter, and the steam-yacht. His cousin Ethel, who was two years older, and inclined to be consequential, said that some people had *more* than a pound; she believed her papa had a hundred a year, and she hoped she would too, when she was grown up. Whereupon her sister Frances, Mac's contemporary, solemnly said: "But when we're growed up, perhaps we'll all be old beggar-men and beggar-women." A tramp, lately seen passing the window, had no doubt suggested the mention of this possibility, which was to Mac a new and startling idea.

Ethel said confidently: "What nonsense;

MAC'S ADVENTURES

it's only poor people who are beggars, not people like us." But Frances replied, "Maybe they were like us when they were little ; and then they growed and growed and growed into old beggars. I wonder if we will. It won't be very nice." Frances's grey eyes were so large and cloudily dark that they would have looked melancholy, even if she had been taking a cheerful view of things, which she seldom did. "I hope I won't be the sort that is lame, and has big bags," she said ; "they're the nastiest of all."

These speculations were taking place towards the end of luncheon at Rathbawn Castle, where Mac Barry and his cousins, and their respective parents, were spending part of the summer on a visit to his grandfather, Lord Ballyduff. The subject was changed at this point by Frances's mother asking Mac whether he would like to drive with her that afternoon, when she went to see Mrs. Fletcher at Manor Vaughan. He said, "The knees of me knickerbockers is too dirty to go anywhere in the carriage, thank God!"

"My dear Mac," said his Aunt Marjory, "you really should not use such expressions."

"*Well*," said Mac, "I'm sure I'm a great deal thankfuller for being too dirty to go visiting people, than for having me dinner—luncheon, I

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

mean. I went with Lil sometimes, and they squawked like hens, and gave one bad little biscuits with caraway seeds in them, at tea. I didn't want anything, but they can't ever let a Person alone, and I'd rather stay at home, thanks."

So Mac, having successfully resisted this distasteful entertainment, it was settled that the little girls should go, and he resumed his meditations upon the future and its possibilities. The particular one spoken of by Frances had taken rather a hold on his mind, being both novel and unpleasant. He had never formed any theory about the origin of old beggar-men, and he now could think of no facts that struck him as satisfactorily inconsistent with their evolution out of a person like himself. Ethel's argument did not reassure him in the least, because he thought very poorly of her sense. Just at that moment she was teasing her mother to let her put on a new frock, which seemed to him exceedingly despicable folly. But he was not disposed to agree with Frances in accepting the possibility as an inevitable fate; he would rather look upon it as a peril to be guarded against. And for this reason he thought he would, in the first place, consult any people upon whose judgment he at all relied, as to

MAC'S ADVENTURES

whether they believed it to be really impending. The number of these persons was small, the more so because his father and mother had both gone away for a few days; however, he presently found his Uncle Herbert writing in the library, and jogged his elbow as a preliminary to a conversation. This caused a blot on Colonel Barry's letter, and perhaps on the record of his language for the day, but Mac said with a sort of bland surprise, "By Jove, that's a big black one. But you must have had a great deal too much ink in your pen, you know. You needn't prod it down to the bottom of the bottle every time, as if you were fishing with it."

"Well, what do you want?" inquired the ungrateful recipient of this good advice.

"Look here," said Mac, "would you think that a person like me would be an old beggarman when he growed quite up?"

Colonel Barry had just been looking over a highly unsatisfactory account, and what with that and the blot, felt pessimistic about things in general. "Upon my word," he said, "as far as I can see, it's beginning to look as if we were all uncommonly likely to come to that one of these fine days. But run off, young man, for I'm busy."

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

“ I should have thought,” said Mac, moving towards the door, elaborately at his leisure, “ that *you* were too old to grow into anything else ever. And I *am* going out, as it happens, to speak to young O’Sullivan.”

Mac found young O’Sullivan, who was rather a crony of his, raking gravel not far from the house. It did not accord with his sense of the fitness of things to consult this friend point-blank about his own future prospects, and he therefore said, after a while, with a view to leading up, “ Do you think, Dan, that you’ll ever grow into an old beggar ? I s’pose you’d rather not—a raggety old beggar-man, you know.”

But young O’Sullivan replied curtly, “ ‘Deed then, sir, I never heard tell of any of me name but was very dacint, respectable people. I dunno what talk you have about beggars.” And collecting his rake, hoe, and brush into a bunch, he dumped them down across his wheelbarrow, and trundled it huffily into a shrubby walk.

This source of information being thus prematurely stopped, Mac had begun to wonder why young O’Sullivan went off in such a hurry, when he saw coming along the avenue the same old man who had passed by the window

MAC'S ADVENTURES

at luncheon, and who since then had been visiting the regions of the kitchen. He seemed to be a very typical beggar-man, with a mysterious-looking leathern wallet, a long beard, and garments that flapped in large square tatters; and it struck Mac that here was a favourable opportunity for obtaining knowledge from the fountain-head. Consequently he said in reply to the new-comer's salutation: "I can't assist anybody, because I've left all my money upstairs in a drawer that locks. What used you to do before you began to walk about?" This appeared to him the most delicate way of describing the other's profession. "Hadn't you ever any money of your own? Or had you as much as a florin and a sixpence, and a silver mug belonging to you any time, only then you grewed up different?"

Old Joe Gafney had never been endowed with great conversational gifts, and was not now capable of much beyond his professional litanies, but Mac's question chanced to touch a theme upon which he still always waxed eloquent, and he said, "Is it money? Och, begor, sir, it's the grand little bagful I had saved up, that I kep' unbeknownst under the hearthstone at home, till one day me rogue

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

of a wife she ups and robs me of it, and I away at Dunardmore Fair. On'y for her doin' that on me, the divil a fut 'ud I ever ha' took to thrampin' the road. Plenty I had saved. Ah now, sir, wasn't she the quare thief of the world to go rob me that way?"

The appeal somewhat embarrassed Mac, to whom it seemed unmannerly either to controvert or endorse this opinion of Mrs. Old-Beggarman. As for the bag, it had never indeed existed save in Joe's imagination; but he believed quite as firmly in it as in the hot sun shining on his bewildered old head, and he maundered on volubly, until at last he abruptly broke off, and began to shuffle along with a whining request that a poor man might be relieved for the love of God.

"Oh, it's the grand-governor," said Mac, rather glad to see his grandfather approaching. Lord Ballyduff relieved all the parties concerned by means of a penny, and Mac joined him on his stroll. The prospect of growing into an old beggar-man had somehow become gloomier in Mac's eyes during this interview, and now looked so ugly that he did not like to speak of it to anybody. He was meditating deeply upon plans of precaution—a hoard of savings might, apparently, be efficacious, if

MAC'S ADVENTURES

inaccessible to one's wife—and when Lord Ballyduff said: "What were you talking to that old fellow about?" he waved the question away with a preoccupied, "Oh, business—business, that you couldn't possibly understand."

His grandfather was accustomed to such rebuffs, and they continued their walk without any more interruptions. They were going to the haggard, where a new rick was being built up in fragrant bundles under its shiny zinc hood. Outside the broad-leaved doors Lord Ballyduff threw away the end of his cigar, and carefully stamped out the red spark with his heel. "It wouldn't do to have a flare-up in there," he said.

"What would you do if you burnt it all up?" said Mac.

"Well, for one thing," said Lord Ballyduff, "the Insurance Company would have to pay me five hundred pounds."

"For burning up all that hay?" said Mac with interest. "Then why on earth don't you? Would they pay all the same if it was me burnt it up? Yes, did you say? When you speak so indistinctually, you make a person quite deaf." It seemed to Mac that here was a very easy and enjoyable mode of securing a

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

provision against an indigent old age, and the idea charmed him so much that his blue eyes gleamed in his small sun-browned face. "How many is five hundred?" he said.

"Oh—more than you'd know what to do with, at any rate," said his grandfather.

"Wouldn't I just?" said Mac. "Well enough I'd know. I'd keep it in the same place with me cartridges. I should think one's wife would be afraid to go meddling with it then. When ladies and girls see a person looking at a gun or anything, they all say, '*Oh, yawpy, yawpy—don't touch it—it's very dangerous*'—great idiots. But I declare there's Mrs. Knox at the gate. If she's going to John Loughlin's, I'm going with her to see the new calf," and he ran off with his mind for the time being diverted from provident cares.

Mrs. Knox, housekeeper at the Castle, was a sister of John Loughlin, who held a goodish little bit of land over towards Alanmore, and had long been wondered at by neighbouring farmers for his persistence in keeping it under meadow year after year, till some of the fields, they said, were got that thick with moss, you might think he was after laying it down like a carpet at so much a yard. He had a right to plough them all up, and not have e'er a

MAC'S ADVENTURES

haycock sitting in a one of them for the next half-dozen years. But John Loughlin continued to disregard their advice, and with the exception of a field or so of oats—which he was suspected of growing only for the sake of the thatching straw—had every rood of his holding waving with the long grass as sure as June came round. His haggard was a sight to be seen. It contained the accumulations of many a season, for grudgingly and of necessity did he consume or sell any part of his garnered crop. In the sheltered corner, against a screen of tall elms, rose up the long-ridged ricks “with wedge sublime,” flanked by sharp-peaked pikes like gigantic peg-tops, all in capes of golden straw surmounting their soft umbers and greys. One small rick of very old clover hay which had been cut in smooth slices, looked as close and dark in grain as a brown loaf. To pace up and down at the end of the paddock, whence he had a good view of their array, was his favourite recreation, and he indulged in it for some time on that brilliant July afternoon, while his sister and Mac were making their way towards him over the sunny fields. The view was even more than usually interesting to him just then, because the joy of building a new

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

rick would so soon begin. All his meadows were down, and some of them up again in large cock, ready to be drawn in : the others were turning themselves into hay under the hot sunshine, with the least possible demand for labour. There would be, he calculated, barely room for one more big rick at the north-west angle of the walls. That would fill the haggard chock-full, not another ton would it hold. However, when Grace married Ned Lawlor—and the wedding might take place before next Shrove-tide—two ricks must go for her dowry, which would, alas, make some room. It said a very great deal for the sincerity of John's feelings towards his granddaughter that he could endure to anticipate such a woeful gap. He had for a long while past been reconciling himself to the prospect, and commonly wound up his self-conflict with the reflection, "Ah well, sure it's the best thing I can do for the crathur, and that's one good comfort anyway. *She'll* be as plased and content as anything at all events."

Therefore the contrariness of things, and the differences in people's points of view, are clearly exemplified by the fact that all the while Grace was looking askance upon his beloved haggard, and could not bear the

MAC'S ADVENTURES

thoughts of Edward Lawlor. This Grace was the eldest child of his favourite daughter, who had been afflicted by matrimony with a struggling husband and a long family. To diminish those burdens he had some years before adopted Grace, and taken her to live at the farm, on the understanding that in due time her marriage portion should be provided. She found favour in his eyes, and it became rumoured in the parish that the portion would be, at least, "a very tidy little bit of money." So much so that Robert Lawlor, who was a warm man, when in quest of a suitable alliance for his son Ned, thought it worth while to consult John Loughlin on the subject. The result of the negotiations had been satisfactory, though not decisive. There was no need for hurry, as the little farm old Robert had in his eye for Ned would not fall vacant yet a while, and the fortune of another not impossible daughter-in-law required cautious and deliberate investigation ere a final choice could be made. Neither was John unwilling, for his part, indefinitely to postpone the removal of his granddaughter and his two stately ricks. But that the affair was being talked of everybody knew, Grace herself among the rest, and she had unhappily taken

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

a strong dislike to Ned Lawlor from the first moment that she beheld him sitting with the sun shining through his red whiskers in his pew near the pulpit at ten o'clock Mass. She now said to herself that she would never marry him, whatever anybody might do or say. Yet she was so used to seeing matches made up as a matter of course that she felt almost as if she were resolving vainly against a sort of fate which would overtake her whatever she might say or do. The project had not reached a stage at which her grandfather would mention it to her; and being a shy and silent girl, she had never expressed any sentiment that could give him a clue to the state of her mind. He never guessed at the steady growth of her abhorrence for Ned Lawlor and everything connected with him, even the touch of his hand on the gate-latch, which she was wont to rub up with an old duster after he had gone through. But she knew right well that no such proposal would ever have troubled her had it not been for her bit of fortune, and she was also quite aware that this lay stored up among the tall ricks, and nowhere else. Often enough she had heard it said that every penny her grand-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

father was worth was in his hay. Consequently it was natural that she should look upon the haggard as a grievance and a bane. "Bad luck to them," she would say, "I wish the whole of them was burnt to dust and ashes out of that." (Grace may be excused, since there are few of us who have not at some time or other been ready to follow the example of the swineherd Ho-ti and his lubberly son.) And on days when she had happened to fall in with Ned Lawlor, it must be owned that she frequently added, "and himself in the middle of them."

This did occur on the morning of the day in question, when he stepped over to see about the loan of a hay-shaker, and had rather a long interview with her, at which he considered himself to have behaved with an agreeable mingling of gallantry and facetiousness. He would have been much surprised, poor man, to learn that fright and detestation were the sentiments which he had inspired; but so it was. In fact, Grace's spirits did not soon recover from the dejection caused by his jokes, and when the shadows were beginning to lengthen she was glad to see the portly figure of her good-natured great-aunt Lizzie coming along under the hedge of Killenbeg Corner.

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

A little company might help her to shake off the odious recollection.

Mrs. Knox and Mac had had a somewhat perplexing walk. Hitherto, Mac's experience of nature had been gathered principally at the seaside. He had not yet quite unlearned the instinct to seek in the gravel for shells, and he still felt disappointed at its unproductiveness of any desirable varieties. Lanes and yards and fields abounded for him in extraordinary objects, concerning which his curiosity was only restrained by his constant wish to pose as one of those who know. But to-day his ignorance was complicated by a theory which he had based upon his grandfather's remark about the fire insurance. He had understood the grand-governor—a mode of address adapted from his father's—to announce a reward of great magnitude offered for the destruction of hay in large quantities; whence he inferred that hay was esteemed a worthless substance, to be got rid of summarily like weeds and other rubbish. Now therefore, as they took their way through the scented meadows among the silvery-green swathes and encampments of peaked cocks, he puzzled Mrs. Knox by suggestions which seemed to argue rash and destructive propensities in

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Master Mac, whom she had heretofore regarded as an unusually reasonable and peaceable child. "Why, it 'ud be a sinful pity to go do such a thing, Master Mac," she replied to a plan which he had propounded for clearing a newly-mown field by sweeping it all into the big horse-pond at one end; "it 'ud be no good for man or baste, after soakin' that way in the water. But maybe the child's thinkin' of flax, that has to be steeped, sure enough. Is that it, honey? Ah, dear now, it's the quare botch you'd make of your hay crop if you gave it the same thratement as flax. 'Deed and I remember the stink of it, when they would be steepin' it in the bog-holes up at me poor father's place. But hay's another pair of shoes. I must tell John the notion you had. But sure it's the fine little farmer you'll be one of these days."

"It's very vulgar to *daffaw* at everything a Person says," Mac observed with dignity, for Mrs. Knox's remarks had been threaded on a creaking laugh. Among farming people, even a small lay blunder supplies matter for infinite jest. "I dare say it *is* better to burn it up," he said. They were just then passing a gap in the hedge, on the other side of which lay a newly-weeded turnip-field, and close by,

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

a withered heap was crackling and sending up a blue writhing column, through which the flames could hardly make a wraith-like glimmer against the strong sunshine. The white flakes of the ashes came fluttering across and sprinkled him, as two blissful small boys stirred up the fire with sticks. Mac would have liked to stand and at least look on, but Mrs. Knox said: "Ah, come along out of the blindin' smoke, Master Mac dear, or we won't have time to get Gracie to wet us a cup of tay."

When they reached the farm, Mrs. Knox was glad to sit down and wait for that refreshment in the cooler parlour, while Mac preferred to accompany Nellie Reilly, the ploughman's daughter, on her mission styward with the pigs' bucket. He did not, however, consider himself under her surveillance, and she being intent upon collecting eggs, and gossiping over the yard-wall with some friends returned from the hay-fields, made no attempt to exercise any. So he presently strayed down to the far end of the farm-yard, where he made a most important discovery. Sitting on the top of the broken door-post belonging to a ruined shed, he found a little green and yellow match-box. It had a portrait of Parnell on one side, and a political cartoon on the other,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and it contained a single slender pink-headed match. Mac had so often been warned against meddling with matches, that to strike one seemed an exquisite pleasure. But just now his mind was occupied with more serious matters than mere present enjoyment. Close by was the open door of the haggard, and it immediately occurred to him that this gave him a grand opportunity for securing the splendid sum which his imperfect knowledge of the insurance system led him to look upon as the meed of the incendiary. Here was quite as much hay as up at the Castle, and here were the means of setting it all in a magnificent blaze; and with five hundred pounds warily stowed away, safe from a Mrs. Mac of predatory habits, he felt that the fear of the old beggar-man's fate need no longer trouble him. "For," he reasoned, "if a person had even as much as one pound, one wouldn't go about after people saying: 'Och, your Honour's glory, give a poor man a copper, and the blessin' of God be wid you.' " And thereupon, with his precious box in hand, he proceeded to the haggard.

Some loose bundles of hay scattered near where one of the largest ricks stood on its low platform of stones and logs, seemed to

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

him a suitable starting-point for the conflagration. The striking of the match took place successfully, and the delightful fizz and splutter and sulphureous odour left nothing to be desired. But to the eye the result was decidedly disappointing. Even under the shadow of the big rick, the air was so full of light that the little artificial flame could make only a faint bluish quivering in it, hardly visible, and Mac at first thought with dismay, "It's gone and went out." When it touched the hay, however, matters improved. Small golden stars began to kindle, and run twinkling along the fibres, and now and then a tiny red tongue flickered perceptibly through a puff of white smoke like a tuft of thistle-down. John Loughlin, sauntering in the paddock not many hundred yards distant, might well have been smitten with a foreboding of ill, but he continued to gaze complacently upon his treasury, recking naught of the destroyer, who at that moment was squatting in the midst of it, clad in a brown holland suit and a broad-brimmed straw hat several sizes too large.

And after all, Mac's triumph was but brief. For a while the fiery golden stars increased and multiplied, and hurried hither and thither like a raid of luminous ants. But soon they began to

MAC'S ADVENTURES

dwindle and diminish, vanishing with a blink as bubbles do, until at length their bright array had been reduced to a solitary spark, the progress of which he watched with the deepest concern. It ducked and dived in and out of sight among the soft grey-green tangle, alarming him by prolonged disappearances, and then gleaming forth again, after he had almost given it up for lost. But finally it sped and hid itself in the heart of a more intricate wisp, and thence he was never to see it re-emerge, though he watched for it long and earnestly, as a cat watches the hole's mouth in at which an expeditious mouse has slid. At last he had sorrowfully to abandon the hope that it would ever come gliding and glimmering back. His grand design had failed, and for the moment he perhaps regretted the glorious blaze that had been frustrated more than the accession of wealth which should have therefrom accrued. As he trotted back into the yard he resolved to say nothing about the matches. Mac's experience of life had not been very great, yet it sufficed to teach him that success justifies the means, and throws a handsome cloak over sins which would have worn a far less reputable habit if things had turned out otherwise. If he had burned John Loughlin's ricks down to

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

the ground, he would have proudly owned the deed, and would have expected to receive not only his five hundred pounds, but also many praises unqualified by any moral reflections upon the impropriety of meddling with matches. Whence it appears that, although his premises were not altogether founded upon fact, he reasoned from them correctly enough. As it was, he could only rejoin Nellie rather crestfallen, and soon afterwards he set out for home. His little cousins had returned before him ; Ethel out of humour at her relapse into private life and an old frock, and Frances pre-occupied with her own affairs, so the evening closed dully.

Yet all the while, had he but been aware, the fire-seed he had sown was thriving to his heart's desire. At first, indeed, a dampness in the lock of hay had most gravely menaced it with extinction, but it survived this peril and kept its hold on existence with gradually strengthening grip, until about sunset a waft of breeze came ruffling lightly over the littered floor of the haggard, and at a critical moment fanned the spark into a delicate flame. As the dusk fell this grew from the dimness of a wild violet's petal to the vividness of a scarlet poppy—of a great glowing cactus-cup—and then flared into

MAC'S ADVENTURES

a many-leaved brilliance such as never yet endowed any blossom sprung from the black earth.

John Loughlin had slept only a short while when he awoke to the consciousness of a fierce red light streaming into his little bedroom, and fluttering against its white wall like the reflection of a flaming wing. His window looked over the yard to the haggard, but he hardly needed the sight to assure him, he knew so well what must have happened. The nightmare of many a sleep had come true. Those awful pinions were indeed flapping and soaring around his ricks, with pale smoke rolling and rushing between, against the massed shadow of the trees and the smooth-vaulted dark of the moonless sky. From the first moment when the glare met his dazed eyes he felt that his fate was sealed, and the knot of onlookers who gathered about the doomed stacks were unanimously of the opinion that "wid the hould the fire had took on them, and the quare dryness of everythin', you'd as much chance of puttin' them out as of puttin' out the stars in the sky." There was some running about with bucketfuls from the failing pump, and some futile splashing of water, but everybody recognised the bootlessness of the attempt, and soon desisted from it.

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

The spacious night all around him was very dark and still as John Loughlin stood watching his ricks burn away. A belated corncrake far off across the fields creaked faintly, as if the wheels of time needed oiling, and a star looked down a long way, here and there; else the fire alone made sound and light. It roared and crackled as it leaped and soared, scaling the carefully heaped-up hay mounds; sometimes it dragged down from their sides, as if with a giant hand, great masses that came slipping and flaring to the ground, and sometimes it plucked off flaming plumes and bore them up into the air. Some of these were caught on the overhanging boughs of the elms, where they hung like strange fruit, which shrivelled and blackened the fresh green leaves. The scattered litter of hay and straw underfoot burst every now and then into a blaze, so that the whole haggard seemed to be paved with a fiery sheet, presently smothered beneath a heavy rug of woolly smoke beaten back by some caprice of the breeze. All spectators had to keep on the dark side of the low surrounding wall; not even a dog ventured in, though rats could be heard flopping desperately off the rick-stands, and rustling as they fled. But shrill yelps at a prudent distance showed that the fugitives

MAC'S ADVENTURES

were not escaping unmolested, and green, blinking eyes peered out of ambushes whence many a productive pounce was made.

So hungrily swift was this fire, and found fare so much to its mind in the drought-parched stacks, that it had well-nigh made an end of consuming them before the prompt midsummer dawn came back, cold and grey as a lingering remnant of the sunset. It showed sundry shapeless black heaps, which lay with white smoke straining up through them, and shook into spangles of crumbling gold if they were stirred. John Loughlin's ricks, in short, had resolved themselves into materials over which he could no longer exercise any owner's rights, and he was a ruined man. Not a penny of them was insured. He had obstinately refused to take this precaution, not because he grudged the expense, but from a superstitious prejudice against acting on the hypothesis of so intolerable a calamity. If his death had seemed as odious to him, he would never have made the will which was locked up in a drawer with his lease, and a few things that had belonged to his wife. But now that the dreadful event was an actually accomplished fact, he seemed to contemplate it with rather surprising equanimity. He made no comment when

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

Tim Mahony, close beside him, said to Andy Farrell: "Bejabers, it's plenty of room we'll have there, and we drawin' in to-morra," and Andy replied: "To-morra? Faix then we'd be the fine fools to go about that job to-morra, or next day, and the place as thick wid red sparks lyin' as a hayloft wid seeds—wouldn't we, sir?" Only as he turned back through the cold dimness to his house—a meagre little white-washed box, originally a barn, and hardly so big as his most sizeable rick had been—a cock hard by uttered a drowsy crow, whereupon he looked round at the men who were following him and said: "Some of yous wring th' ould screech-owl's neck." And they muttered among themselves: "Och, the poor man—to be sure he would be greatly knocked about."

It seemed, indeed, as if his granddaughter Grace were more crushed by the misfortune than he. After they had finished their dreary breakfast, she retreated into a dark corner of the kitchen, where she sat such a picture of despondency, that the old man, watching her, began vaguely to wish he could offer her any consolation. He recalled her long visit yesterday from Ned Lawlor, and it suggested to him how probably she was fretting over the

MAC'S ADVENTURES

lost prospect of that alliance. This notion somehow touched his pride, and set a spring of energy stirring through the dull lethargy in his mind. To himself he said: "Sure I might be conthrivin' as good a match for her one of these days yet;" and to Grace he observed encouragingly: "Well, it's a grand warm mornin' anyway." Grace only murmured something dolorously; and in a while he got up and went out of doors. As he did so the first object he noticed was Daddy Yellowman set on a window-ledge in the sun. Daddy Yellowman was a very large canary-coloured delft jug, which had lived for a long time on the Loughlins' dresser, and had become quite an institution at hay-making, when carried afield with the froth of porter at its lips. John Loughlin now took it up, and filled it, for conveyance to Long Leg, where he knew there were people working. By the act he seemed to turn and face the possibility of going on.

Not long afterwards, Grace, who for her part had recognised the necessity of putting on the potatoes for dinner, was startled as she made up the languishing summer fire by the entrance of Nellie Reilly, wearing an expression of very contagious alarm. She had run

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

at full speed through two or three fields, and was much out of breath as she clutched Grace's arm and said, between frequent pants: "I'm just after meetin' himself—the poor master—up in Killenbeg Corner—widin a stone's throw of the pond. It's there he was goin' as sure as anythin'—och saints—and about dhrowndin' himself he might be as like as not, that's what I'm thinkin'—for the lads was sayin' he's clane ruined entirely—and indeed he was lookin' as black and as bitter as sut, and I passin' him by, the poor man, he was so. But mercy on us all, there's ten fut of wather standin' in the deep pool up under th' ould thorn-bushes—and the botthom all a mask of thick mud—if a body got in there you'd never see sight nor light of him agin."

The two girls stared dumbly at one another for a few moments, with a sort of horror reflecting itself to and fro between their faces, and growing on its way. Then Grace rushed out of the house, retaining the fire-shovel unawares, and Nellie followed at her heels. They raced on over the pale-green of the lately shorn meadows, catching their feet in scattered wisps of hay, and stooping their heads against the dazzle of the sunbeams. And as, cresting the slope in Killenbeg Corner, they came close

MAC'S ADVENTURES

upon the pond, the first thing they beheld was Daddy Yellowman shining very brightly set beside the edge. At sight of it Nellie gave a scream. "The Lord be good to us all," she said, "carryin' it he was; he's after throwin' himself in." But Grace flung herself down on the bank under the hedge, with her apron over her face and her fingers in her ears, and rocked herself as if she would lull her remaining senses to sleep. Whereupon Nellie broke into a wailful lament. She had an unsuspected listener, whose emergence from behind a curve of the hedge struck her overawedly mute; and Grace heard a voice inquiring: "What's the matter with her?" It was no less than Lord Ballyduff, who had come across the fields upon the report of the disaster befallen his old acquaintance and tenant John Loughlin. Grace recognised the voice, but through too stormy a cloud of trouble to leave her any constraining respect for persons, not even for Quality in the shape of a lordship and a landlord. So she continued to rock and bemoan herself. "What'll I do at all at all? Och me heart's broke. Sure it's meself's the wickedest crathur this day in the width of Ireland that's as good as took and burnt up me poor grandfather's haggard on him, forby dhrownin'

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

of him in the black pool. But sure if I'd ha' thought he'd go for to do that, I wouldn't ever ha' let the big rick get on fire, 'deed and I wouldn't, not if there was forty Ned Lawlors botherin' one in it. Dhrownded dead he is be this time, and it all along of me burnin' his ricks, that dhruv him distracted."

But the voice that replied: "Musha good gracious, what talk have you, girl alive, about burnin' and dhrowndin'?" made her uncover her face, to confront a refutation of her despair. For her grandfather, safe and sound, stood beside Lord Ballyduff, with whom, indeed, he had merely been conversing just round the corner. He was eyeing Grace with some disapproval. It seemed to him all of a piece—a small piece of course—with his other misfortune that his granddaughter should be discovered by his lordship sitting keening under a hedge, bareheaded, holding an irrelevant sooty shovel in her lap, and accusing herself vehemently of disastrous crime. "What ails you, then, to be sittin' there makin' a show of yourself wid our ould shovel?" he said to her in a mortified undertone. "Faix, one might ha' thought you'd had enough of fires at home to contint you." An appeal to regard for appearances was, however, thrown away upon

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Grace, whom more tragical thoughts were engrossing wholly. "Glory be to goodness if you're not dthrownded," she said, "but sure it's no thanks to me, after lettin' the whole place burn to black cinders. For there it was, when I run down to the haggard late last night after the supper, to see had e'er a one of the hins been layin' in it—somethin' I noticed shinin' alongside the big rick, and sure enough, the bit of ground was creepin' all over wid sparks and wee flames of fire, like as if somebody'd dropped a lightin' match among the hay. And first of all I was goin' to let a yell for the lads to come and put it out; but then I thought to meself 'twas a good chance to be gettin' shut of him, if I just let it alone. So I slunk in wid me, and never a word I said about it."

"And what the mischief at all made you go do that?" said her grandfather, feeling himself threatened with the disclosure of fresh afflictions.

"It was—it was Ned Lawlor," said Grace, beginning to stammer a little over her explanation. "You see I knew his father and you had talk of him and me. And in course it was on'y the bit of money they was after, you would be givin' wid me—and every penny of

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

that in the ricks—and I can't abide the thoughts of Ned Lawlor—I hate the name of him."

"Then the divil's in it that you couldn't ha' said so," her grandfather said bitterly. "Sure if you'd tould me, never a word more talk would there ha' been about the matter. Sorra the match 'ill I make up for a girl agin her will, not if the other folk was offerin' to stock the counthry-side for her—troth no wouldn't I. There was me poor sister Maggie, her they married to an ould feller up at Anna-lone, whether she would or no, and if they did, it's follyin' at her buryin' we were widin a twelvemonth of the weddin'. Sez I to meself that same day, it was neither art nor part I'd have in any such a thing in the len'th of me life, and I hadn't, nor I wouldn't. Your mother plased herself. But bedad now a lass is more conthrary to ha' doins or dalins wid than a dumb baste of the field, for sooner than spake a sensible word to you, she'll take and set house and home flarin' in a blaze about your ears."

Her grandfather's censure of her silence might not have been unanswerable, but Grace's mood was too remorseful to seek for justifying arguments, and she resumed her lamentations under her apron, saying, "Sure, I tould you I

MAC'S ADVENTURES

was the wickedest crathur ever walked. 'Deed, I wish I was after dhrowndin' meself in th' ould pond there, and a better job it would ha' been." This could not be permitted, and the old man said soothingly, "Ah, whisht, then, whisht; that's no sort of talkin'. And sure now, maybe there's no such great harm done, after all. Maybe it's foolin' meself I was, in a manner, thryin' to fill up me mind wid the thought of th' ould stacks. I'd do righter to be breakin' up the meadows, and gettin' in the crops—if I could contrive it," he added, brought up short by the recollection that his ways and means had largely become dust and ashes.

"Here's your sister, Loughlin," said Lord Ballyduff, somewhat relieved by the diversion, as Mrs. Knox appeared at the neighbouring gate. "And, by Jove, I believe there's that young scamp." For a small figure scudding along by the hedge developed itself into unmistakably Mac.

Mrs. Knox arrived first. The business which had brought her hurrying through the noon-tide heat was so important that she did not hesitate to enter upon it even in the presence of his lordship. "Well, to be sure, John," she said to her brother, "you're the unlucky man.

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

Howsome'er it's unluckier you'd be this minute if everybody else was as headstrong as yourself—Gracie, child, have you a mind to be ravin' wid a sunstroke, that you've run out wid ne'er a shadow of a shawl over your head? But as for your hay, John, that's clane destroyed and gone to loss if there was nobody, only you, mindin' it, that wouldn't put it under the insurance for man or mortal, it's right enough all the while, be raison of me payin' it into the Alliance office for you this last five year as regular as the clock. All the papers I have belongin' to it up at the Castle. Six hundred pounds they'll pay you on it, and if that doesn't cover it all, 'twill make a good offer at it anyway."

"Troth and it's youself's the quare one," said John Loughlin.

"I always said that Mrs. Knox was one of the most sensible women I knew, Loughlin," said Lord Ballyduff, "I believe the best thing I could do would be to appoint her my man of business. But you should come up to the Castle at once and look at these papers. Mac, you run up against one like a spent cannon-ball."

"Never mind," said Mac forbearingly, "I suppose you weren't looking."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"As far as I can judge, your lordship," said Mrs. Knox, highly gratified, "all we have to do is, send word of the fire to the Insurance Company, and they're bound to pay us the money, though whether to me brother or meself I can't precisely say. To him, I should suppose, but anyhow, it's all the one thing, for 'twas on his account I done it."

"It's a great lie," said Mac. "Look here, grand-governor, she's telling a *most awful* untruth." Although manners had at first kept him from breaking in upon Mrs. Knox's speech, excitement and impatience now made the tone of his interruption all the more unconventional. "She didn't burn them a bit, don't believe a word she says," he asseverated. "It was me lit them with a match, and I thought it had went out on me, but it mustn't have, after all. So it's *me* that they're to pay the six hundred pounds to, and not to anybody else. Why couldn't you stop and wait for a Person? I've been running after you all the way to tell you that you'll have to write for the money to those people, because I don't exactly know where they live. But mind you say it wasn't she burnt them at all—it was me with a pink-headed match that I found in the yard. Young O'Sullivan told me they were all destroyed."

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

"This is a very shocking story of yours, Mac," said his grandfather, looking aghast, "and I hope to goodness that you're only romancing."

"Why, to be sure he is, your lordship," said Mrs. Knox with conviction. "Sure, how at all would the innocent child get to do such a thing, and he never next or nigh the place till yesterday evening, when he came over wid me, and wasn't out of me sight, except only a few minutes that he ran out into the yard along wid Nellie Reilly there, and she'd take good care of him, or else I'd not have trusted——"

"'Deed then, we were only just through the yard—never set fut in the haggard, bad or good; and where'd he get matches, ma'am? Sorra a one was there," Nellie protested loudly, recoiling scared by the sudden prospect of being drawn into the meshes of responsibility. "I never took me eyes off him the whole time," she averred.

"Oh, didn't you, *my friend*?" said Mac, with crushing emphasis. "Had you them on me when you were talking to the people with pitchforks in the lane over the wall, that you said you wouldn't listen to gabbin' nonsense out of them? And I *was* in the hay-place, and I *did* find some matches—it was only one

MAC'S ADVENTURES

match—in a little yellow box with pictures on it, that was near the calves' house. But it went off beautifully against the scrappy stuff on the side. And if you don't believe it, you may go and see where it is, for I put the box back there when I was coming in. Only there' nuffin in it now, except itself. Grand-governor, you'll have to write for my six hundred pounds."

Lord Ballyduff looked perplexed and uneasy, as Mac drummed impatiently on him to emphasise his injunction; but everybody else took, or professed to take, Mrs. Knox's view of the matter, and she said, ah sure, it couldn't have been that way at all, for if Master Mac had had anything to say to it, it would have been in blazes of fire long and long before. A burning spark wasn't a sort of thing could go crawling about any length of time unbeknownst like a hay-spider in a haycock. Their scepticism aggrieved and enraged Mac, as it threatened to filch from him the fruit of his successful enterprise; but his wrath seemed to avail nothing, and presently his grandfather said that they must be getting home, as it was nearly luncheon-time. The group accordingly separated, John Loughlin with his sister and the girls returning towards the devastated

MAC'S WAYS AND MEANS

farmstead, through the meadows, where he imagined, reluctantly enough, the cold gleam of the ploughshare shredding up their old green mantle. Mac and his grandfather went back to their somewhat out-at-elbows looking little ancient Castle, but they proceeded severally and silently, for Mac's resentment led him to stalk on ahead and decline entering into conversation. He was already sitting on the steps at the end of the terrace when Lord Ballyduff arrived, just as the luncheon bell rang.

"Come along, Mac," said Lord Ballyduff.

But Mac replied without stirring: "If I do be an old beggar-man, I can tell you I'll never say 'Long life to your Honour,' and 'Heaven be your bed,' no matter *how* many pennies you give me."

The contemplation of this prospective revenge so far soothed his feelings that they permitted him to follow his grandfather into the dining-room. Yet, in the middle of his sago-pudding he remarked to his neighbour, Frances, with little apparent relevance, but much scathing sarcasm: "Some people are so wonderful fine and clever that they can't believe anything a person tells them."

To which Frances, turning upon him wide

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and melancholy eyes, made answer : " Maybe some day you won't know any better, Mac, yourself."

And Mac said reflectively, looking towards his grandfather's end of the table : " I suppose they get all the sense used up that they had when they were rather youngish. Do you think your mamma's a hundred, Frances ? A person must make 'lowances for them. But they may burn up their old ricks themselves next time. *I* intend to get my own living in another way."

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

Some Jokes of Timothy

THE earliest of Timothy's jokes that was memorable may be considered his first step towards the reputation he eventually reached, since, had he not played it—a practical one it was—the chances are that he would never have endured so much leisure for propounding jocular views of things on the bridge of Rathbawn. Just at the time, however, this result was quite out of sight, round many a corner, and its more immediate consequences failed to amuse anybody.

It was a sunny afternoon in March, and Timothy had been for some little time diverting himself by dropping turf-sods down the Widdy Meleady's chimney. The feat was just difficult enough to be interesting, as the black-rimmed smoke-hole opened in the end of the Widdy's mossy thatch farthest from the tall bank, against which her little house stood, with its roof slightly below the level of the lane, so that Timothy had to aim carefully and often at the delicate blue smoke-plume. He knew that the result of success would well

MAC'S ADVENTURES

repay his pains, experience having taught him what would follow upon the flight of a missile down the dark mouth. Open would fling the house's door, and forth would hobble its very ancient little old mistress, who would shriek up to him shrill threats and reproaches and lamentations, and totter furiously about her small yard below him, like a wasp with sticky wings, while he rolled in laughter on the swarded bank, and waited for her to go indoors that he might resume his bombardment. In fact, he was acting on the penny-in-a-slot principle, albeit this March day fell long before railway platforms were enlivened by scarlet automatic machines.

But even the simplest machinery gets out of gear sometimes, and now a sort of hitch occurred. For when next the dark clod had gone skimming true to its mark, the door did, sure enough, fling open, but the person who came bolting out was not the little old decrepit woman with her ineffectual hobble, and futile menaces. On the contrary, it was her great-nephew, Dan M'Grenaghan, a renowned racer and wrestler of the neighbourhood. At sight of him Timothy said : " Murdher alive," and darted off up the hill behind him, on the last run he ever took. For in his headlong hurry

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

he tripped over the furze-masked edge of a disused stone-quarry, out of which he was drawn with a leg broken in so complicated a fashion that "the docthors had to take it off for repeers, and very belike they may be tinkerin' at it yit," as Timothy used to say afterwards when relating his disaster. A long time elapsed, however, before he learned to turn out the facetious side of the incident.

Still, notwithstanding its woeful associations, he did once again play his favourite turf-and-chimney joke. It was on the fine May morning when he first made his way on crutches as far as the Widdy Meleady's cabin, with the help of two little O'Gradys, who were several sizes smaller than himself. "Sling one down on her, Tim," urged Paddy, as they rested on the bank, and a broken sod lying handily within reach, tempted him to comply. Down it went with great precision, and out came the old Widdy. But when she saw Timothy she said: "Och, sure it's him divertin' himself, the crathur," and returned indoors without another word. That was, perhaps, the bitterest moment in all Timothy's life.

Then, before many months had passed, another misfortune overtook him. It had been on his track for some time, and may have

MAC'S ADVENTURES

literally come up with him all the sooner by reason of his lameness. For his mother's health, which was failing at the time of his accident, thenceforward declined more rapidly, and her fretting over the prospect of leaving him "alone in the width of the world, without so much as his two feet to stand steady on," no doubt hastened the arrival of the dreaded parting. Not that she was so forlorn as she might have been. The shelter of at least two neighbouring roofs interposed between Timothy and the grim white walls of the dreary House at Allenstown. For in Rathbawn lived the families of her brothers-in-law Paddy O'Rourke and Nicholas Crinion, of whom she often said self-reassuringly, that, "at all events, neither of them would let her own child and poor Larry's go to loss." In this belief she remained unshaken, practically, even when she felt most despondent; but she could not always forbear to recollect that her sister Biddy O'Rourke "did be sometimes as cross as a weasel," and that Nicholas Crinion's wife was "as near and close as she could stick together, and so were them she came of; sorra one of the Sheehans but was the makin's of an ould nay-gur." And she knew well, that for many a long day, seven-year-old Timothy's comfort

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

must depend mainly upon the disposition of the woman of the house. To set against these disquieting considerations, she could reflect that "Biddy's husband was a big, soft gob of good-nature, without e'er a tint of bad temper in him, even when he had a drop taken," and that Nicholas Crinion "had always been a rael dacint, quiet man, and no better brother than he had her poor Larry." So that upon the whole she might have reviewed her little character sketches with tolerable equanimity.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that she spent rather a large part of her last months at Rathbawn in scheming how to propitiate the kinsfolk with whom she was to deposit the dearest thing she owned. But it must not be supposed that she sought to do so by enlarging upon the value of this treasure. That would have been a crude and inept device. In those days she was constantly drawing comparisons between the qualities, mental and moral—no competition was now, alas, possible as to physical—of Timothy and of his cousins, the young O'Rourkes and Nicholas Crinions. "Ay, bedad, Biddy," she would say to her sister, "it's the fool poor Timothy is at his figures compared with your little Nannie, that's quick as lightnin' flashes, and she only a twelve-month oulder

MAC'S ADVENTURES

than him. 'Deed, it's the poor offer he'd make at sayin' his twice times the way her father had her, when they come to see us last Sunday."

"Her father hasn't so much sinse as you'd crack a cockle wid," Mrs. O'Rourke would reply grimly. But it was her habit to be grimly pleased.

Or Mrs. Nicholas Crinion might happen to call upon her invalid sister-in-law, and then Mrs. Larry would not fail to point out in how many desirable properties Timothy was excelled by his cousins. "Sure you'll not have much throuble gettin' *them* places, Lizzie, when they're any size at all. It's plased people'll be to employ them, and they that willin' and bidable. But poor Timothy was always as foolish as if he hadn't plinty of wit. Playin' thricks was what he'd mostly be givin' his mind to. Not but what he's quiet enough these times, the crathur. And keepin' an eye on the child he could be, or goin' on a bit of an errand, if it wasn't far to spake of, and no great hurry about it—and not pourin' outrageous, Lizzie, the way he would be drowned entirely hobblin' so slow under it. And anyhow you'd scarce notice him sittin' contint in a corner."

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

To which Mrs. Nicholas, unluckily, was rather likely to rejoin : “ Ah sure, my childer’s brought up to know right well that work they may git, or hungry they may go ” ; a view of the matter other than what Mrs. Larry had hoped to elicit.

On one of these occasions, Timothy, after the visitors had departed, came and looked sternly at her, leaning on his crutch. “ There’s no child to be keepin’ an eye on,” he said.

“ Sure, not at all, I was only supposin’, be way of a joke,” said his mother.

“ Where’s the sinse of supposin’ nonsinse ? ” Timothy demanded, and withdrew, not waiting for an answer, which would hardly have proved satisfactory.

But his mother reserved her great stroke of policy until she felt that the time remaining at her disposal for the execution of her designs had become very strictly limited. Then she expended a long-hoarded sum of “ three thrup-pennies ” upon sugar-sticks and bull’s-eyes, and bade all the young O’Rourkes and Crinions to a feast. This took place in mid-winty weather, with deep snow all round, including a small drift, like a wonderfully white pillow, just inside the wide-chinked door. The stark cold had made her cough so much worse that she

MAC'S ADVENTURES

was obliged to keep her bed, whence she could only issue hoarsely-whispered exhortations to Timothy to be liberal in distributing the sweets, and admonitions to behave himself like a good child. To do Timothy justice, he was quite spontaneously disposed to comply with the first part of her injunctions, and he dealt out streaky white sticks and treacly black balls in no niggard spirit. The latter and vaguer half of his instructions were not perhaps so scrupulously obeyed. At least, some parts of his behaviour did not strikingly resemble that of a conspicuously good child.

Towards the close of the entertainment, when Mrs. Larry's house was filled with an odour of peppermint that could almost be seen and when anything one touched seemed inclined to adhere, Nicholas Crinion looked in on his way from work to ask how his sister-in-law was, and expressing regret at finding her so indifferent altogether, sat for some time by the hearth, where the red firelight glowed redder as the outer world grew all a colourless black and white. The remoter parts of the room, however, were left in a dusk dim enough to cast a veil over the proceedings of Timothy and his cousin, Mick O'Rourke, who were busy at something near the door. Presently Tim-

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

othy came forward, and to his mother's gratification, very politely offered his Uncle Nicholas a long white sugar-stick, one end of which was neatly wrapped up in newspaper.

"Och no, thank'ee kindly, Tim, me man," Nicholas said blandly. "Sure, I lost me sweet tooth ould ages ago, and I question will I ever find it again. Ait your bit of candy yourself."

"But I'd a dale liefer you had it," Timothy persisted affectionately. "Put it in your pocket, anyway, and be bringin' it home."

"Sure, not at all," Nicholas said hurriedly stuffing both hands down his pockets, to prevent a possible intrusion of the unwelcome gift. An ill-advised move, as he found; for Timothy, suddenly saying: "Och, bejabers, but you must have it!" thrust the white stick, which had already begun to drip suspiciously, down the back of his uncle's neck, while his confederate, Mick, jumped ecstasically up and down on the snowdrift at the door, scattering moist flakes about the room. No one who has experienced the sensation of a lump of half-melted snow slithering along his back like a horribly agile slug, its progress only accelerated by the vain attempts of a groping forefinger to arrest its downward career, will underestimate the constraint which Timothy's uncle

MAC'S ADVENTURES

put upon his feelings when he appeared to be pleased and exhilarated by this instance of his nephew's pretty wit, and protested with sincere-sounding laughter that the young rascal had had the better of him that time, at all events. But perhaps most people would have done likewise, had they too caught a glimpse of Timothy's mother's face, watching the scene with the expression of one who beholds a last hope wantonly destroyed. Nicholas's well-feigned sportiveness lulled that fear to rest, and enabled her to breathe again as freely as her circumstances ever permitted. Still, she felt that an unjustifiable risk had been run; and later on in the evening, when they were alone, she said remonstrantly to Timothy, who was finishing a bull's-eye in much comfort by the fire: "It's a terrible child you are, Tim, for jokin' and playin' the fool, and it's too free you make sometimes intirely."

Timothy so deeply resented what appeared to him the injustice of this rebuke, that he hastily swallowed his diminished sugar-ball, thriftlessly, and at some risk of choking, to retort, "And I'd like to know who was makin' jokes yourself about mindin' childer, no great while ago?" And this gibe—such is Fate's

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

fine sense of the fitness of things—was almost the last speech that Mrs. Larry had of her son Timothy.

At his mother's wake it was settled that Timothy should be provided for conjointly by his uncle, Nicholas Crinion, and his aunt, Biddy O'Rourke, and thenceforward he had his abode under their roofs, sometimes one, and sometimes the other, "just accordin'," as they said themselves. Nobody could have foretold from one day, or even hour, to the next, among which troop of barefooted children he might be included at dinner-time or bedtime; and the tribes both of his Crinion and O'Rourke cousins were so numerous, that one more or less might be supposed to make little difference. This promiscuous arrangement had its advantages and its drawbacks. In one respect Timothy found it decidedly convenient; for the two families lived at opposite ends of the long street, and Timothy discovered that a hasty hobble down it would generally bring him from the O'Rourkes' big black pot to the Crinions' before the last steaming pitaty had been distributed; by which not scrupulously honourable means, he pleasantly supplemented his midday repast. He seldom inverted the order of procedure,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

because his Aunt Lizzie under such circumstances was apt to be embarrassingly particular in her inquiries as to whether he had already dined. It must be said for Timothy that only while he was at an age when people are naturally very hungry and very selfish did he practise this trick. Later on, he made just the opposite use of his opportunities, and would sometimes come in falsely representing himself to have had a bit down below or up above, as the case might be. On these occasions it was his Aunt Biddy who felt suspicious ; but she used to think of her scanty stores and large household, and keep her misgivings to herself.

Thus, in the matter of board and lodging, the dual guardianship worked fairly well. But where clothing was concerned, it had a tendency to introduce the principle that what is everybody's business is nobody's. Mrs. Crinion would be of the opinion that, "Supposing Timothy's bit of a coateen had gone to flitters entirely, it was a queer thing if Mrs. O'Rourke couldn't contrive to make him up some sort of a one, and she with three boys bigger than he growing out of their rags every minute of the day, until cast off they must be " ; while Mrs. O'Rourke had, from just the same premises, arrived at the conclusion that "Mrs. Crinion,

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

with the most of her childer little girls, had a right to be better able to keep a dacint stitch on him, than a body who had a young rigiment to ready up by some manner of means."

These conflicting views may have had a somewhat adverse influence upon the repairing and replenishing of Timothy's wardrobe. It was, indeed, hardly possible for his tatters and flitters to be wider and wilder than those of his cousins; but the neighbours naturally fancied that they were so, and when in a censorious mood, spoke to each other about the scandalous figure his aunts kept the poor orphan child. Mrs. Hoytes once even went so far as to declare it was a public show; and Judy Mullarkey, choosing a subtler method of conveying disapproval, ostentatiously presented Timothy with a very old knitted scarlet comforter, all ravelling into threads. But Mrs. Crinion promptly unravelled it a little more, and used the wool for mending the handle of her market-basket, where it gleamed conspicuously on the very next Saturday—a thrifty retort which Judy did not fail to appreciate.

Perhaps Timothy may really have been rather unusually tatterdemalion just then, as he and his relatives were going through a spell of hard times. A rainy, blight-bringing sum-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

mer had conducted them to the threshold of an autumn bleak and menacing. Illness had been infesting them, and at that very moment a dreary chaos reigned in the O'Rourkes' household, because its mistress was laid aside with crippling rheumatism.

Timothy's other aunt was at first disposed to think it an additional misfortune when her cousin, Andy Sheehan, came driving along in his donkey-cart one of those frosty mornings. For Andy had long been considered a calamitous member of his family, having wasted his substance and come down in the world. He had started in life as the owner of a small shop and a little bit of land, which, after a few years, he found himself obliged to relinquish, setting out anew with his possessions dwindled into an old donkey and cart, and confirmed tastes for drinking and betting. Thus equipped, he adopted the ill-reputed calling of an old-clothes man which he pursued with scanty profit, and still less credit to himself. So much less, indeed, that his cousin, Lizzie Crinion, had accounted for a recent cessation of his periodical transits through Rathbawn by supposing him to have got into some especially serious trouble with the police. Now, however, it appeared that things had been looking

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

up with him. Bits of good luck had fallen in his way. He had found a five-pound note in the lining of an ancient waistcoat, purchased for fourpence and a three-halfpenny mug. Also, he had made a tidy little sum of money over a horse he backed at the Listowel races. And he had bought himself a new donkey, and a fine stock of crockery wherewith to carry on his barter.

Andy related this to Mrs. Crinion at her door; and shortly afterwards, when drinking tea by her fire, while the children minded his property outside, he remarked that he was looking for a small spalpeen of a boy, to sit in the cart, and keep an eye on Nellie and his wares during the transaction of business. For want of such a coadjutor, he had had a grand delft jug stolen off him quite lately, and, furthermore, Nellie had come near overturning the whole concern, straying up the bank after grass. "I suppose, ma'am, you wouldn't think of loanin' me a one of your little gossoons?" he concluded, half jocularly.

"Och, not at all, man, not at all," Mrs. Crinion hastened to reply. "Me Pather's too big—a fine tall fellow he's grown—and me Joe's a delicate little crathur—och, not at all." She might, with perfect truth, have added that

MAC'S ADVENTURES

she would be long sorry to send e'er a child of hers travelling about the country with the likes of any such an ould *slieveen* as Andy Sheehan, who was drinking morning, noon, and night, if he got the chance, and had the divil's own temper when he had a drop taken. At that very minute she doubted was he altogether sober, and it scarce ten o'clock.

"There's that one-legged child I seen along wid them, he'd do me right enough," said Andy.

"Is it Timothy? Och, well now, sure, he maybe might," Mrs. Crinion said, her mind instantly grasping at the pitaties and farrels of bread that his absence would leave at her disposal. "It's not much he's good for here, the dear knows, except to be aitin'. But he's 'cute enough, mind you, and his leg keeps him quiet. He'd sit in the cart as steady as a rock."

"Well, then, it's comin' this way agin I am to-morra night," said Andy—"I'm stoppin' above for the Drumclune fair—and pickin' up the brat I could be."

Mrs. Crinion considered for a moment. "You might so," she said then. "But look-a, Andy, don't be lettin' on anythin' about it to man or baste. For, you see, be raison of his bein' poor Larry Crinion's child, Himself as like as not might take up wid some fantigue

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

agin lettin' him go. And his aunt, Biddy O'Rourke, might be talkin'. But if he just wint off wid you promiscuous, 'twould be like as if you was only givin' him a jaunt, and 'ud prisintly lave him back. So they'd contint themselves wid that notion till they was used to missin' him."

"Ay, to be sure," said Andy; "and then any time, if I wasn't contint, or the brat wasn't contint, I do be passin' plinty of Unions in diff'rint places, and I could drop him at a one of them aisy."

"Ay, could you, aisy," said Mrs. Crinion. She was still thinking of the pitaties.

Meanwhile Timothy, in complete ignorance of the arrangements that were being made for him, was on his way to do an errand at Lawlor's shop. To him, slowly halting over the bridge, Jim M'Guire, lounging there, bawled: "Och, Timothy, man, just stop and tell us which of the ould scarecrows you might be after strippin' of that grand coat you have streelin' round you. Was it Mr. Kenny's? For I seen he had an iligant objic' of a one in his barley last time I was passin' through." A gibe to which Timothy's rejoinder came shrill and prompt: "Ay, bedad, had he. But it isn't there now, as you'd a right to know, when walkin' off wid

MAC'S ADVENTURES

itself it was—the very same way you was a-goin’.” And applausive peals followed him down the street.

It would seem as if Timothy’s mood must have been particularly facetious that morning. At any rate, when a few minutes afterwards Tom Crosby handed him over the counter a loaf, with the remark: “It’s riz a farthin’,” he was led into replying too innocently: “Arrah, now, is it any differ in the sort of yaist?”

“I’ll not be long learnin’ you the differ, if I come across to you,” Tom said sternly, and with such an apparent intention of coming, that Timothy turned to flee precipitately, and in so doing dropped the loaf, which rolled thumpingly into an inaccessible corner behind some meal-barrels. He was trying to fish it out with his crutch, propping himself perilously against the counter, when somebody came to his assistance.

This was a much smaller boy, in a grey suit, which, unlike the garments commonly worn by the youth of Rathbawn, did not appear to have been originally designed for an elder, and inartistically curtailed. His hat alone seemed to be somewhat a misfit, and was set so far back on his head that its broad brim made him

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

a sort of halo, misleadingly, for his caretakers often considered him "a very bold child." It fell off on the floor in his crawling among the barrels, which drew to him the attention of Maria, the maid, who was conversing with Mrs. Hoytes close by. So, just as he was handing the loaf to Timothy, she called to him reprovingly, "Ah, what are you doing there, Master Mac? Come out of that with yourself. It's no way to be behaving, and you a nobleman's grandson."

"I wish to goodness," said Mac, "that you were a nobleman's plaguy old granddaughter, and then you'd have to be behavin' yourself instead of *booverin'* other people."

And Mrs. Hoytes said, soothingly: "'Deed now, it's the good nature the young gentleman has in him. And poor Timothy's a dacint little child, that's hard-set to be creepin' about. Sure, the Crinions and the O'Rourkes do be very respectable people, livin' here all the days of me life."

Mac, who was visiting the Longfields up at the Grange, had presently an opportunity of making further acquaintance with this well-connected youth. For in the course of that afternoon's walk the sunny grass of a bank by the river tempted Maria to sit down and take

MAC'S ADVENTURES

out her crochet. It happened that Timothy was at hand, pegging pebbles at a boulder, whose ledged recesses seemed to promise "troutses," and with him Mac fell into a conversation, which Maria, on the strength of Mrs. Hoytes's testimonial, and her own wish to finish her collar, did not feel called upon to interrupt. As they were moving along to take up another position of attack, Timothy accounted for his obvious difficulty in getting over the sliding gravel by the remark that it was "very unhandy to be lame of the both of your feet in one," and he went on to explain how he had lately stepped, with painful results, on a bit of broken glass.

"Boots," suggested Mac, "would have kept the sharp edge of it off, and they aren't so much *bouwer*, if you don't let her lace more than every second hole." He glanced down with complacency at his own footgear, which, as the fruit of frequent contention with Maria, were fastened on this time-saving principle.

"The last ould brogue iver I owned," said Timothy, "went off wid itself on a swim down the river, and it niver come back."

"But I saw plenty of them hanging up in the shop," said Mac; "near the buckets they were, and the legs of bacon."

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

“Sure, the only body I’d have a chance of buyin’ a one off of ’ud be an ould Lepracaun,” said Timothy.

“I happen not to remember his shop,” Mac said carelessly.

“Och, now, don’t you, then?” Timothy said in apparent surprise. “The little ould fairy shoemaker, that’s as wizendy-up and quare-lookin’ as ever you beheld. Sure, I’d ha’ thought, if you was anywheres at all, you’d ha’ been apt to see a Lepracaun. But nobody ever seen him makin’ more than one boot at the one time—that’s sartin. So I’d ha’ no throuble wid gettin’ him to break a pair for me. It’s quare to be watchin’ him workin’ away, tickin’ tackin’ wid his little silver hammer, and his leather apern, and he in his grand green coateen, and his red cap wid a white feather streelin’ out of it the len’t’h of your arm, like a bit of a moonbame got crookened.”

“Where does he live?” Mac asked, with interest.

But Timothy was surprised again—mortifyingly so. “Musha, good gracious, it is where does he live? Sure, where else would an ould fairy be livin’, except it was at a fair? That’s the *raison* of the name.”

“*Of course*,” Mac said, with dignity, upon

MAC'S ADVENTURES

receiving this piece of etymological information. "I meant where does the nearest one to you live?"

"Sure, very belike there might be a one in it to-morra at the fair in Drumclune, that's no great way off," said Timothy.

"I've drove there," said Mac. "But perhaps a person who had cut his foot with broken glass, which is very dangerous to leave lyin' about, couldn't walk so far to get anythin'."

"Anyhow," said Timothy, "thim boots th'ould Lepracaun would be sellin', does be terrible expensive. The price thim sort of crathurs do be axin' would frighten you. Keepin' his boot he may be for me."

"Would it be as expensive, I wonder, as two florins, and a sixpence, and a threepenny-bit?" said Mac. "And I wonder does he make boot-laces too, or have you to get them from somebody else?"

"Ay, bedad, would it, every pinny," Timothy said. "Why, there's ne'er a Lepracaun in the counthry but owns a big crock full up of gould that he's got wid chaitin' thim that buys his boots. Look-a, sir, there was somethin' lepped in the pool."

But Mac continued to wonder.

The next morning was all blurred with cold

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

mists, white on the dark hills, blue on the green fields, and leaden-grey overhead. Towards noon, Timothy established himself on the parapet of the bridge, quarters which he preferred to the smoky gloom of a cavernous kitchen, though the drizzle, swarming thickly about him, pricked his face and hands chillily, as if with the alighting of a cloud of half-thawed icy midges. His Aunt Lizzie, on his going out, had exhorted him with unwonted solicitude not to stay stravading round under the wet too late ; and she had previously been dilating, without much apparent relevance, upon the good luck of anybody who might get the chance of jaunting through the country in a grand little ass-cart. But Timothy, surmising no connection between these two facts, nor any possible bearing of them upon his own future prospects, heeded them very slightly at the time, and gave them no further thought.

The weather and the fair having diminished loungers, he had the bridge all to himself, until by and by Felix Riley came along, driving home three heifers, whose witless heads pointed persistently in wrong directions. Felix now allowed them to drift a bit down the road unsteered by his blackthorn, and stopped for a word with Timothy. "There's apt to be blue

MAC'S ADVENTURES

murdher up above at the Grange to-day," he said.

"What's happint them?" inquired Timothy.

"Sure, up there, about Martin's cross-roads, I'm after meetin' the little chap that's visitin' the Doctor—Master Mac they call him—stumpin' along his lone, which I well know they'd niver countenance his doin'. He slipped out, belike, widout their knowledge. But when I made free to ax him where he was off to, he answered me mighty stiff that he'd business at Drumclune fair; and that's no place, to my mind, for the likes of him to be sthrayin' in. Sure, he isn't the size of anythin'; and might very aisy be over-run wid the first drove of bastes come his way. So, if you hear anybody axin' about him, you might just say where I seen him. I've me heifers to git home—and, bedad, there's the red one about steppin' into Mr. Duggan's."

"It's after the Lepracaun he's goin', I'd bet me life," Timothy reflected, with remorse and amusement mingled. "Sure, he thought every word of the ould blathers I tould him was true. 'Deed, but it's quare the foolery childer'll be believin'," he said loftily to himself, from his altitude of nine years.

He sat for a while longer considering in the

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

drizzle, and then he saw George Mack approaching with a high-piled cart-load of hay. "Is it for the fair above you are?" Timothy asked.

George replied: "Ah, sure, not at all. I'm just about slingin' it in the lough over there, for fear anybody might be offerin' to buy it off of us."

"Gimme a lift," said Timothy.

"Och, but you'd niver contrive to git up that height," said George; "and there's no room on the shaft."

"Right enough, I'd contrive," Timothy said. And so he did, crutches and all, whereupon the load resumed its waddling way towards Drumclune.

Timothy had not been mistaken in his conjecture concerning Mac, who was about this time arriving at the fair. He found it a rather bewildering place, where many of the people one met seemed to stagger along and bawl in a strange and undignified manner, and where sudden rushes of large beasts came by, with horned heads awkwardly on a level with his own, which some persons—quite other persons, of course—might possibly have found startling. Nor did he anywhere light upon traces of the green jacket and long white feather, of which he was in quest. This gave him a foreboding

MAC'S ADVENTURES

of failure, and somehow made him the more alive to the fact, of which in his conscience he was well aware, that he should not have set forth upon the expedition unauthorised by his elders.

So that he was feeling slightly forlorn and discouraged, when at last he wandered into a little back lane, where nothing particular seemed to be going on. At one end of it, into a recess meant for holding broken stones, a donkey-cart had been drawn—the donkey was nibbling a grass bank close by—and converted into a temporary old-clothes stall. Garments of various kinds were hung from the erected shafts, and piled on boards placed counter-wise across it, interspersed with tempting clusters of the crockery, which often played a leading part in bargains struck for ancient coats and shawls. The proprietor sat on the low wall behind it, in a weather-beaten, greenish great-coat. He was elderly, small, and wizened, with a deep-red face, and hair several shades lighter ; and he said to Mac : “ Fine day, sir. Might you be a-wantin’ anythin’ ? ”

“ A boot I was wantin’ ,” said Mac, who by this time had almost given up hopes of the Lepracaun ; “ but the right place for gettin’ it at doesn’t seem to be here to-day.”

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

“Is it a boot?” the old man said, hopping up with alacrity. “Sure, I’ve the grandest stock of thim to-day, at all. A pair I have this minyit ’ud fit you delightful, sir, as if they was made to your iligant measure.”

“But I want only half a pair,” said Mac; “and I want it not to fit me. I don’t know exactly the size, but one that both my feet would fit into at once would be about big enough.”

“What would you say to that, honey?” the old man said, clumping down before him a large and heavy boot, whose travelling days were evidently nearly done.

“It hasn’t any lace in it,” Mac said, being disposed to adverse criticism by the term of endearment.

“A lace, sir; is it a lace? Me sowl to glory, sure, all the gintlemen ever I knew buys their laces sep’rit. Not but what a nice bit of string off of a parcel looks as tasty as anythin’ you could get.”

“How dear is it?” Mac inquired, beginning to pull out his red leather purse with a silver “M” on the flap.

Eyes expectantly twinkling watched the process. “Why, that’s accordin’,” said their owner. “But it’s apt to be as much as all

MAC'S ADVENTURES

the shillin's a customer would have along wid him, anyway, and worth every one of them, and more."

"Would it be more than two florins," the customer said, laying down the coins, "and a sixpence, and a new threepenny, and another sixpence ; only it's a queer, crumpled-up shape, and Val says it looks doubtful ? "

"Well, now, just to oblige you, sir, I might contint meself to take it," said the old man ; and a bony clutch was descending upon the little heap of silver, when another hand intercepted its pounce, and covered its prey under a firmly-pressed palm.

"Ay, would you, bedad, y' ould robber," the new-comer said, "if you got the chance."

This was Timothy Crinion, whose equipage had lumbered past just in time for him to espy Mac at his bargaining, and to intimate a wish to alight by dropping a crutch on George Mack's head.

"Git out of this, you young vagabone," said the old man, "and don't be offerin' to meddle wid the young gintleman's money he's just after payin' over to me."

"Och, but yourself's the notorious great chait, ould Andy Sheehan," Timothy retorted, keeping one hand resolutely on Mac's property.

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

“Look at the rubbishy bit of thrash you was takin’ all his shillin’s for,” he pointed a scornful finger at a huge chasm in the upper leather of the decaying boot. “You wouldn’t give so much as a cracked taycup for three pair of them, and that you wouldn’t.”

“I’ll git the pólis, and thry what *they*’ll be givin’ *you*, you unchancy-lookin’ spalpeen,” said Andy.

“Git them, and welcome,” Timothy defiantly said. But he gripped the money, and calling “Come along,” to Mac, swung himself away as rapidly as he could.

Mac naturally followed, but the old man could pursue them only with maledictions and threats, being conscious that the earth was not spinning as steadily as it had done before the contents of a certain black bottle had shrunk and sunk.

Timothy had not much difficulty in convincing Mac of the worthlessness of Andy Sheehan’s wares, and the advisability of deferring a purchase to a more favourable opportunity. “For,” he urged, “the Lepracaun might happen to be in it some other day, and you wid ne’er a farthin’ left. But if you was wishful to be gittin’ a somethin’ now, there’s me Aunt Biddy ’ud be terrible thankful

MAC'S ADVENTURES

for a limon. Cruel bad she is wid the rheumatics, and sez there would be nothin' aquil to a limon, when she's chokin' wid the thirst all night." And Timothy had some trouble in halving Mac's prompt order for a dozen. His most effective argument was a whispered, "Sure, if you git that many, they'll be thinkin' you're mistakin' thim for a clutch of eggs, and buyin' thim to put under an ould hin."

Then John Harrel, from Carrickmore, the next place to the Grange, met the two boys just as he was going to drive home in the jennet-cart, and he gave them a lift back to Rathbawn, where they arrived before Mac's absence had caused any serious uneasiness.

And although he had done no business with Andy Sheehan, it seems probable that the frustrated transaction was not without its effect upon the fortunes of Timothy. All that evening Mrs. Crinion expected the arrival of her cousin's donkey-cart to carry off the interloping nephew, but it did not come. And when Andy next appeared in the village some weeks later, he merely vouchsafed a surly good mornin', driving past her door, and was already provided with a travelling companion in the shape of a small, oppressed-looking boy. She could conjecture no cause for Andy's change

SOME JOKES OF TIMOTHY

of mind, and ascribed it to "some contrary fantigue," in her ignorance of how Timothy had displayed an inconvenient readiness to pick holes in the goods of his proposed employer. Yet, though she deplored the result, a more disinterested judge of the case might have been inclined to pronounce Timothy "better off stopping where he was," even if his stay promised him no more brilliant prospect than the watching of many miles of clear brown river-water slipping away beneath Rathbawn bridge.

A WEDDING GOWN

A Wedding Gown

I

BARAVON HOUSE crests, with its many gables and chimney-stacks, a green slope at the foot of which the Avonbawn River flees by. The Avonbawn always runs in haste here, its waters not yet having unlearned the habit contracted when descending some very steep mountain paths. Even in the least rainy weather, the boulders that roughen its course through this little glen are kept incessantly weaving white foam-fabrics. These are sometimes folded into snowy bundles, and stored away for a while behind rock-ledges, or in shelving hollows under the banks ; but, as a rule, they are carried off straight from the loom, and swept down the stream, which they robe with long, trailing vestments of lace and lawn, and diaphanous veils, flowing and floating fairly fine. In wetter seasons, when all the hills are veined with milky torrents, and the far-gleaming streak of the waterfall hung

MAC'S ADVENTURES

up high on Slieve Crieven spreads out over the cliff's face like a great white hand, the Avonbawn comes past in fury, and smothers the boulders under one blanched sheet. At such times the water's tossing rim laps up to the flower-beds which Madame Delaney had set at a discreet height above the margin long ago ; and then daffodils and valley-lilies, fox-gloves and irises, bluebells and snowdrops and crocuses, may be washed from their root-hold and drowned. Still, clumps of them continue to flourish, despite inundations, up and down among the trees that climb the slope to the sombre girdle of a tall yew-hedge. This hedge is the wall of the Baravon garden-pleasance, and arches cut in it let out glimpses of jewel-bright sward and blossom. Across the river rises another bank, so thickly clothed with firs that the small church on top of it shows only an ivy-todded tower above them. A solidly-built stone foot-bridge makes a way to and fro, joining two winding paths. About its piers the foam gathers into deep, fleecy mats.

Within the massive hedge you come on a flowery lawn, sloping up to a level space round the house, one wing of which looks into it with wide, low windows and a porched door. There are arbours and fountains in it, terraces and

A WEDDING GOWN

pleached alleys, a rosary, and a sundial ; in fact, all the features of a garden except two : gravelled walks, namely, and earthen flower-beds. For Madame Delaney, who laid it out originally, had declared that she would have nothing ugly in her garden, and that ugly she considered gravel and brown mould to be. Furthermore, she said that wherever there was gravel, there was also sure to be somebody scraping it up with a rake, and setting all your teeth on edge, which made her doubly determined to have none of it about the place. Madame Delaney was a spoilt only heiress, and a richly-dowered wife, so that her wishes were generally carried out, and her plants had to thrive on a grassy carpet, while her walks were softly green, and often, it must be owned, wet underfoot. When she left them, long since, her successors kept them in the same state, and she would have found few changes to chide if she had revisited her ancient haunts, as she is, indeed, reported to do " of an odd time," in the gathering dusk or glimmering moonlight.

In the course of years, Baravon House and demesne became the property of some Barrys, a younger branch of the Ballyduff family, and then it remained unoccupied for a decade and

MAC'S ADVENTURES

more, as its new owners lived abroad. That is to say, it was not left quite uninhabited, but the presence of a caretaker merely, could not hinder it from being considered vacant from a social point of view. The caretaker was Mrs. Margaret Lonergan, a widow, who before her marriage, somewhat late in life, had spent many years in the service of the Barrys. Her position had been one of trust, and the Family had held her in high esteem; consequently when she was thrown on the world with two little girls to provide for, it seemed a piece of good luck from every point of view that Baravon House should just then have required a caretaker. So she took up her residence there with Maggie and Isabella. In any ordinary circumstances she would have been assigned lodgings in the kitchen regions, and would have visited the more ornamental parts of the mansion only for occasional dustings and airings; but Mrs. Lonergan, as a privileged person, was allowed to take possession of rooms in the garden wing, very comfortable, indeed luxurious quarters; and she had a stipend correspondingly liberal.

Thus it happened that little Isabella Lonergan, who was not three years old when she came to Baravon, had no recollections of any

A WEDDING GOWN

rougher mode of life than she found there. It would have been impossible for her to imagine the conditions of existence in the little houses from which her parents, the smallest of small farming folk, had come. Nothing of the sort had ever been brought within the range of her experience. Her mother herself had quitted them early for a long domicile in a very big house, and her brief return to them during her married life had been a period of such unhappiness that it was hidden away in silence. All her reminiscences were of Hanra-moyne Castle, and old Lady Dormer, and Sir Gerald, and Miss Frances, and Miss Isabella, with a setting of what her humbler neighbours would have called "all manner of grandeur"; which gave little Isabella an impression that they themselves must, if anything, have rather come down in the world. However, she was, on the whole, well content with her position in it, as she had good reason to be. The largest hole that could have been picked in the pleasantness of her life was its dearth of companions. They had no near neighbours, and Mrs. Lonergan preferred that the others should continue to be distant in every sense of the word. And a childless, fairly prosperous brother in Bantry had offered a home to Maggie soon

MAC'S ADVENTURES

after her father's death, with prospects of schooling and a legacy—a proposal too advantageous to be declined. Maggie, therefore, had departed, and Isabella was thenceforward practically without any society except her mother's. But it is probable that she gained as much as she lost by this deprivation, which shielded her from many uncongenial circumstances, and gave her scope for enjoying to the full all the pleasant things within her reach. They were of just the kind that she was born to appreciate, having inherited from her mother the disposition and tastes which had made everybody feel surprised at Margaret Hanlon in her staid middle age incongruously choosing to take up with Denis Lonergan, a good-looking, riotous scamp of an army pensioner. Isabella was as quiet and gentle as her mother had ever been, but dreamier and more unenergetic ; she took as keen a delight in nature and art, with a superadded fastidiousness, which, amid less felicitous surroundings, would have been a source of misery, but which here only heightened her pleasure in the many-hued fragrant garden, and the many-voiced foaming river, and the still shadow of the pine-groves. The long, brown, leather-scented library gave her access at all seasons to the blissful world which count-

A WEDDING GOWN

less people find a haven of refuge, but which was to her seldom otherwise than an enjoyable port of call on a voyage among fortunate isles. Her mother idolised her, and was more often than not employed in working deftly for the adornment of a beauty which she did not err in considering rare and delicate. The M'Cabes, father and son, who were responsible for most of the gardening, had from her first arrival called the sedately proud and serenely gracious baby-girl Her Ladyship and Milady, titles which they never dropped, only using them with more deference as time went on. They addressed Mrs. Lonergan as ma'am, and the distinction seemed to every one quite appropriate. Milady never was called upon to do anything ; but if she liked to help her mother with dusting books and china, or a bit of fine needlework, or to gather flowers, and pick fruits when jam was making, she had the occupation ready to hand ; and it sometimes helped to speed the hours on their way. So her leisurely years sauntered by, too youthful to go fast, and too happy to seem slow. And then, when Isabella was about sixteen, there came a year of changes.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

II

The first of them was the return of her sister Maggie. This was brought about by a week of bitter Christmas cold, which killed their uncle, who had long been in declining health. Maggie came home with a legacy of fifty pounds—which many people would regard as “a fine fortune entirely,” but which was much less than she had expected, for Felix Hanlon’s business had gone down during his tedious illness ; also with a natural endowment of high and blithe spirits, which no pounds could have purchased. She immediately joined the little band of Isabella’s subjects, being deeply impressed by the charm to which her own robust and jolly person offered a most effective foil. It never occurred to her that there was any sort of equality between them, to make grounds for disputing Isabella’s claims. On the contrary, it seemed quite obvious that her younger sister was one of the people who must not get up on chilly mornings till the world has been warmed for them, and for whom the flower and cream of things is fittingly reserved, from the freshest rose of May to the sweetest apple hoarded in frosty-hearted December. As for Isabella herself, she was well pleased

A WEDDING GOWN

with this new adherent. There were, no doubt, some points about Maggie that she would have liked less on a nearer view, if she had taken it, but then she did not. Her attention strayed instinctively away, when Maggie's talk might have revealed harder and coarser-grained aspects of the world than ever were seen at Baravon. Her curiosity was not at all acute, and glanced aside from anything disagreeable. She preferred not to hear about it, even if it had no possible connection with her own lot. When such a connection did exist, it distressed and shocked her. Once when she was a little girl, Mrs. Lonergan had thought to amuse Isabella with an incident from her own childhood, but it appeared in the course of the story that the young Hanlons were obliged to run about barefoot, a revelation at which Isabella was so sadly cast down as to make her mother refrain in future from all such reminiscences. Now, accordingly, though Isabella gladly acquiesced in the addition of her sister to their domestic circle, she did not attempt to imagine what Maggie's surroundings at Bantry had been. She left all conversation on that topic to her mother and sister, and sat by in a book or a dream, letting the sound of their voices flow past unmeaningly. Maggie, for her part

MAC'S ADVENTURES

stirring and practical, was more than willing to take a share in the household duties, and this was convenient, as Mrs. Lonergan had been rather less active than usual since an attack of bronchitis had befallen her at the setting in of winter. Thus Isabella was more than ever mistress of her time, and freed from all need of, as people say, "putting her hand to anything."

The next event at Baravon House was the advent of what would in these days be called a "paying guest," one of the phrases that seem a distinctly written label for an age of shams. His coming was the sequel to a chapter of accidents in the Barry family. To begin with, Valentine Barry was offered a good temporary appointment in Tristia-Syrtania, where the climate is not salubrious for children, and whither he wished to bring his wife. This would have been incompatible with their six-year-old Mac, had not the Gerald Barrys been willing to entertain him during his parents' absence. But no sooner had that arrangement been made, and his parents sailed, than Eva Barry disconcerted all their plans by falling ill of pneumonia, and being ordered to flee southward from the blasts of the March winds. On board the Mediterranean-cruising yacht, by

A WEDDING GOWN

which the escape was to be effected, it seemed impossible to accommodate Mac, who again became a problem. It was solved by a timely thought of Gerald Barry's eldest sister. "Why not send him over to Baravon House?" said Mrs. Deane-Wylwood. "There couldn't be anybody more careful and fonder of children than Maggie Hanlon always was. And there couldn't be a nicer place than dear old Baravon; we used to delight in being there in poor Aunt Alicia's time. Of course, poor Maggie would be only too glad of the chance; and the little girls would be nice companions for him." Everybody whose opinion was of any consequence considered the suggestion an excellent one. Mrs. Deane-Wylwood had not been astray in her conjecture that Mrs. Lonergan would rejoice at the prospect of taking charge of Master Mac, whose father she remembered as an occasional visitor to her nurseries in the good old days. Mac himself did not make any objection. He was accustomed to visiting among his relations, and rather looked forward to an unwontedly long journey to a quite strange place, where he understood that he would be entitled to regard himself as the head of the family. Mrs. Lonergan had luckily always been mentioned in his presence as a

MAC'S ADVENTURES

housekeeper ; the word " nurse " would have had disastrous results. Nor was anything said about the companionship of the " little girls," though their existence was made known to him with a startling shock. His grandmother, oblivious of the lapsing years, had good-naturedly dressed two small dolls for the daughters of her old favourite, and on the eve of Mac's departure she entrusted the parcel to him, with injunctions to bring it over " for Mrs. Lonergan's children."

" Merciful goodness," Mac said, upon receiving the commission, " are there brats about the place ? "

" My dear ! " said his grandmother, " what do you call yourself ? "

" Two wrongs," said Mac loftily, " don't make a right." And she did not attempt to pursue the argument further. Nor did Mac press his protest. So, after a few letters had gone backwards and forwards, he made the journey himself, under the escort of the Barrys' valet, and at the nearest station to Baravon was met by Mrs. Lonergan, whom Dick M'Cabe had driven over on the car.

Mac entered upon acquaintanceship with her smoothly and auspiciously enough. He had no difficulty in classifying her, for there was

A WEDDING GOWN

nothing about her that seemed inconsistent with his other experiences of housekeepers. She looked nicer, he thought, in her black gown and bonnet than most of them ; that was all. And Maggie waiting for them at the gate, in a blue gown and white apron, with her face like a cheerful apple, and her hands full of hot buns, because she was "sure Master Mac must be starved and perished," appeared to him a quite appropriate housekeeper's daughter, especially as he had for the moment forgotten that she was supposed to be a little girl. But soon afterwards, when he was being conducted to his tea, laid out for him in state in a corner of the big dining-room, he fell into a blunder. As he passed through the brown-walled library, which the sunset was filling with long amber light, another girl, who had been sitting on a low seat in the window, rose up and came towards him across the track of a slanted sunbeam. She was dressed all in soft white, with a knot or bow of rose-colour here and there, and wore a misty white shawl over her shoulders. Her small face had little colour in it except the very dark blue of her eyes, and a cloud of dark hair, curled and waved, seemed like the shadow of some wonderfully wrought coronal. She stood looking down at

MAC'S ADVENTURES

him with a bewildered sort of smile shining in her eyes, as if she were pleased and puzzled by his appearance, and he shook hands with her politely, but neither of them spoke, and they went their several ways. Isabella was at the moment so much occupied with the adventures of Constance, a Roman emperor's daughter, victimised by the wiles of a "scorpioun" mother-in-law, that she did not either recall, or speculate about, the circumstances which would have accounted for the presence of this sun-browned, fair-haired small boy. But Mac remarked to Mrs. Lonergan, "She's one of my cousins, I suppose?" for his observations on society had led him to the conclusion that ladies were, as a rule, cousins when young, and aunts when of maturer years. Mrs. Lonergan replied, "Sure, not at *all*, honey; that's just me daughter Isabella." And he afterwards overheard her repeating his mistake to Maggie, who seemed to think it curious and amusing. Now, Mac did not like to make mistakes, nor to have them laughed at; and this one gave him a slight prejudice against the cause of it, Isabella, who also disarranged his ideas by not apparently belonging to any of the social grades he had hitherto recognised. The feeling soon wore off, and they became good friends; but

A WEDDING GOWN

he liked, and continued to like, Maggie better, and she was his usual companion when he could not enjoy the more congenial conversation of the M'Cabes, busy with their spring sowing and planting. To Jim M'Cabe, his particular crony, he one day expressed the opinion that Maggie was three times prettier than Isabella ; but Jim avoided committing himself to one view or the other in what seemed to Mac an unnecessarily cautious manner. " You needn't suppose or imagine that I'd go and repeat it," he said offendedly, " for I wouldn't ; not if you said she was as ugly as a whole flock of black crows."

" And what at all 'ud bewitch me to tell such a quare lie as that of milady ? " said Jim, who was tying a rose-branch to a trellis.

" Are you sure she *is* a milady all the while ? " said Mac ; " because, you know, Maggie isn't, and Mrs. Lonergan isn't. So if she is, why aren't they ? "

" And if she isn't, *what* aren't they ? " said Jim ; " for they're someways diff'rint, that's sure. What now would you say to it yourself, sir ? "

This was quite beyond Mac ; but the query flattered him, and he gave it careful consideration. " I would say," he pronounced

MAC'S ADVENTURES

at last, "that if she isn't one, she's different in a very *like* sort of way."

"Bedad, then, I wouldn't doubt but that's how it is, sir," said Jim.

III

The arrival of Maggie and of Mac did not exhaust the events of this very exceptional season. Before May was out, another visitor came to Baravon House, a stranger, and an object of interest to all its inmates.

A few weeks earlier Leopold Rowan had been calling at a villa near Nice, and talking to his aunt Emily Barry. She was Mac's aunt likewise, so to Mac her thoughts naturally enough turned, when her nephew Leopold mentioned his purpose of going to the south of Ireland for some shooting, and spoke of spending a day or two at Glenmoreen. "You'll be within easy reach of Baravon there," she said; and then after a short hesitation added, "I wonder if you happened to be going in that direction, would you mind looking in on little Mac, the Valentines' boy, you know, who's staying there with our old housekeeper? I feel partly responsible for him now that they are away, and I should greatly like to have a

A WEDDING GOWN

report of him, and to hear something about the old place."

"Why, to be sure I will," said her nephew. "I'll make it my business to look him up, and I'll send you an account of my inspection."

This Leopold Rowan, though only just come of age, was a person of much importance, not merely in his own family, but in a wider world, being heir-apparent to a baronetcy and vast estates, with the prospect of a peerage looming rather more remotely. He was furthermore sufficiently handsome and agreeable to have in all probability become the cause of somebody's making a very bad match, if he had been scantily provided with worldly goods. Therefore, if he had not been a remarkably good-natured youth, his aunt would not have ventured to suggest that he should undertake such a commission. However, he was far from regarding the matter in that light, and put himself a little out of his way to fulfil her wishes promptly.

It was a transparently beautiful spring morning, without a cloud in the sky, when Leopold Rowan paid his first visit to Baravon House. He approached it by a path along the river, which tossed and danced in green and golden meshes on his left hand, while on his

MAC'S ADVENTURES

right a green and golden slope was always running up between the trees, flecked here and there with primroses, wood sorrel, and wild hyacinths. Just past the turn where he came in sight of the stone bridge, that had been described to him as a landmark, he reached a small rustic arbour, through whose doorway he saw the dusky interior all lit up with the glimmering of a white gown. When he was quite near, Isabella glanced up off her book, and Leopold looked and saw her eyes in the shadow of her hair, and stopped to ask his way to Baravon House. Isabella's sister Maggie, who was at this time gathering violets with Mac Barry among the elms close by, observed their meeting, and said to herself that it was like the Sleeping Beauty and the Fairy Prince. Maggie had a tendency towards romance, though she had not met with much of it in real life, and her reading was not wide enough to furnish her with any less hackneyed models for hero and heroine than those in the obvious old fairy tale. On the present occasion, however, her similitude was not inapposite.

Everybody at Baravon was more or less aroused by this latest new-comer, but the king, courtiers, and domestics, so to speak, in no such magical degree as the Princess. For she

A WEDDING GOWN

woke up into a very wonderful sort of dream.

Certainly Leopold could not have been charged with any remissness in performing his promise to his aunt. He was better than his word, and evidently resolved to make himself thoroughly acquainted with his little cousin's surroundings. This could not be accomplished in a single visit, although it was a long one ; and he returned on the next day, when he spent a considerable portion of the afternoon in whatever part of the garden Isabella was to be found. His object was, perhaps, to ascertain the kind of influence her companionship might be expected to exercise over Mac ; and with no doubt the same end in view, he arranged to go a-fishing with Mac and his friends on the morrow. But although the expedition set off as proposed, it might have been noticed that the operations with line and net, the splashing in pools, and scrambling among stepping-stones, were almost entirely carried on by Mac and Maggie Lonergan, while Leopold Rowan talked to Isabella about her favourite poets, so far as his somewhat scanty lore allowed him to pursue the topic, whence he diverged to others of a less literary complexion.

This was how it all began, and its develop-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

ment was very homogeneous ; as normal a miracle as the growth of a plant. Before the spring had ripened into summer, it had become a matter of course that Mr. Rowan should spend most of each lengthening day at Baravon, and moreover that on these occasions he should devote his attention chiefly to Isabella. Perhaps, indeed, it is not quite accurate to say that she took the new state of things as a matter of course, for the wonderfulness of it seemed to her continually increasing. Still, she did learn to expect that marvels would happen daily, an attitude of mind which renders it liable to an overwhelming sense of flatness and insipidity, if it be provided only with ordinary occurrences. One day when Leopold had been somehow prevented from coming over, she was almost alarmed by the preternatural slowness with which the hours had passed. What struck her as so very strange was that this Mr. Rowan should have the power of adding such interest, such pleasure to her life. He was the first person she had ever met whose conversation she always preferred to the river's. It is true that her circle of acquaintances had been extremely small. The two M'Cabes practically represented to her mankind. At Mass she had seen a few

A WEDDING GOWN

others, the most distinguished of whom was Major Hancock of The Dykes, large, florid and eyeglassed ; she had heard her mother and sister describe him as a fine figure of a man, but in her own opinion he was detestable. A lack of rivals did not, however, occur to her as explaining the impression made by this stranger. She needed no explanations to account for his demeanour towards her ; that was quite in the natural order of things. Was she not used to the homage of Dick and Jim M'Cabe, and of successive weeding and hoeing boys ? The present pair saluted her with a solemn awe, whereas she had seen them the other day in the kitchen-garden sportively pelting Maggie with last year's shrivelled windfalls. No, the mystery lay in her own sentiments towards him, rather than in his undisguised preference for her, which she accepted without any intentional arrogance as a customary tribute. And very soon she ceased to speculate at all about her feelings ; they were too absorbing to be puzzling ; the mystery was swallowed up in magic.

This same habitual sway of Isabella at Baravon helped to conceal from at least one of the onlookers the full significance of the situation. When Mrs. Lonergan saw her most

MAC'S ADVENTURES

dear daughter singled out and sought after by this very fine young gentleman, she was a proud woman ; but she said to herself : “ Sure if he had eyes in his head, or sense in his mind, who else would he be noticing so long as she was by ? ” Her many years of domestic service, too, had so steeped her in the spirit of caste, that her imagination could with difficulty emerge therefrom. To her view it was extraordinary enough that Mr. Rowan should sit talking to Isabella by the hour together “ for all the world as if she was a lady born,” without proceeding far and away further to presume on his part an intention of making her one in good earnest by way of marriage. Even the surmise that the child herself might take such an extravagant notion into her head, to her sorrow, was slow in coming to Mrs. Lonergan. But eventually it was from the standpoint of her constant solicitude on the child’s behalf that she did attain to a true appreciation of the state of affairs, first becoming aware of the disquieting fact that Isabella was “ thinkin’ a deal of him,” and then, after a course of care-sharpened observation, being half reassured by the conviction that he was “ thinkin’ every atom as much of her.” The relief that it gave her could not but be mixed with much anxiety,

A WEDDING GOWN

so many difficulties obviously must beset the path of such ill-assorted lovers ; so wide was the gulf to be bridged ; so inevitable would be opposition on the other side. However devoted and constant Mr. Rowan might prove himself, she could not tell what insurmountable barriers it might be in the power of his friends to erect against his wishes. And the worst of it was that here her own conscience sided with the former, sometimes against the latter. It persisted in reproaching her with disloyalty to the family, whose dignity, importance, and general prosperity she had for nearly half her life regarded as an interest of her own. It reminded her what she would have thought in the old days if she had heard that one of the Barrys, or anybody “ who was anything to them,” contemplated marriage with the child of an ex-nurserymaid—just such a misalliance as she herself was now passively, if not actively promoting. Right well she knew that it would be a cause of discord and dismay : though the magnitude of the misalliance, and the intensity of the dismay, she was far from realising, in her ignorance that Leopold Rowan was a great personage. Nothing of the sort was surmised either at Baravon or Glenmoreen, where the opinion

MAC'S ADVENTURES

of the neighbourhood unanimously pronounced him to be a real gentleman, but conjectured him a younger son, with the good looks and slender means appropriate to that accident of birth. On this point Mrs. Lonergan was no better informed than anybody else ; and their theories about his status were confirmed into certainty by the length of time for which he remained contented with the most humble accommodation afforded by Terry O'Rourke's rough little tavern. " If it's a very rich man he was," they argued, " is it puttin' up wid the likes of that he'd be for a week, let alone a couple of months ? And nobody cookin' in it only ould Mrs. O'Rourke herself, that's got no more notion of the way Quality expects to have things than the black kettle sittin' on her hob ? "

IV

Leopold himself, who was in the habit of writing occasionally to his aunt Emily, accounted to her for his prolonged stay at Glenmoreen by explaining that he had found the Avonbawn singularly meritorious as a trout stream. His communications being received by a feminine household, which did not include any sportswoman, excited little surprise, al-

A WEDDING GOWN

though it was remarked that nobody had seemed to think so highly of the fishing there in the old days. Of Mac's well-being he sent a faithfully favourable report, and likewise of the good order and preservation of everything at Baravon House under Mrs. Lonergan's superintendence. That from the very first beginning of the correspondence he entirely suppressed her daughters, is a proof of his sudden quickness at the outset, making such a precaution so immediately expedient ; that he continued to take it all through, was by no means due to ignorance of how rapidly he was approaching a point where it must cease to be possible. He was wholly bent upon marrying Isabella, if she would accede to such an arrangement, as seemed, he hoped, not improbable ; and he was fully prepared to do so in despite of all the remonstrances, warnings, and threats, which he could not regard as otherwise than certain to follow upon his friends' knowledge of his intentions. Also he was aware that it lay in their power to express their disapproval with emphasis by cutting off supplies ; but his turn of mind did not lead him to consider this very deeply. On the whole, he thought, his best plan would be to keep the matter a secret from his uncles and aunts, and all his

MAC'S ADVENTURES

kin, until his marriage was an accomplished fact, and then to allow the loveliness of his bride to plead for its justification. This course had at least the advantage of putting off a troublesome day, and of protecting those delightful summer ones from invasion by reproachful, lamenting, pleasure-pricking letters, or perhaps by bodily protestants, more disturbing still. And he adopted it with perseverance.

Thus while the sun of a season unwontedly cloudless and serene continued to shine upon his courtship, it was subject to no human frowns. For Mrs. Lonergan, her struggling scruples notwithstanding, could not but feel the predominance of pride and joy. Else would she have been more or less than motherly, having before her eyes a daughter so beautiful and happy, with a real gentleman—no little *shoneen*, mind you, but one of the old Quality—for her sweetheart, ready to worship the ground she set foot on, and he as fine a young man as a king could wish to call his son. But sure wasn't Isabella herself good enough to be fit for the highest in the land, that anybody need be thinking bad of him for setting his heart on her? Mrs. Lonergan felt that when little Isabella had come to such great grandeur

A WEDDING GOWN

and felicity, her own miserable marriage would somehow be atoned and compensated for, and removed from the category of utter failures. As for Maggie, her only difficulty was to hinder the smiles with which she surveyed the scene from becoming too conspicuously radiant and congratulatory. She seemed to be watching the happening of a fairyland romance, brought about in the heart of her home, and promising to provide with bliss for ever after the dearest of heroines.

Mac's attitude might be described as neutral. He had had no experience of such affairs, and he hardly took any cognisance of this one, until on a certain June morning, when he was with young M'Cabe at the end of the pleasance that is bordered by a mossy path, overarched by the boughs of slender, silvery-stemmed beeches. Jim was using a small mowing machine, and making with it little green fountains, as it whirled over the sward among clumps of many-hued flowers, in what appeared to Mac a very enviable way, though he would not for the world have admitted how soon it made his arms ache when he was let push it. He always relinquished it with the remark that it wouldn't be fair to keep it any longer; to which Jim sometimes inconveniently

MAC'S ADVENTURES

rejoined : " No hurry, sir, no hurry : work away with it as long as you like." On this occasion, Jim had just stopped to clear an entangled trail of chickweed from the wheel of his machine, when the flicker of a white skirt went by between the beech-stems, and Mac said : " I declare Isabella and Cousin Leopold are walking up and down there still. Now I think it's a rather nasty, stupid old path, with nothing but trees in it." Jim looked up and after the indiscriminating walkers. " I wonder now how long it'll be before they've made up a match—his honour, there and milady," he said more than half to himself.

" Are they making up a match ? " said Mac. " What is a m—— ; I mean what particular sort of match is it ? Which is a thing no person can know without being told."

" Well, sir, did you ever hear tell of a weddin' ? " said Jim.

" I've *seen* a wedding," said Mac, " it was the greatest nonsense on earth. And grand-mamma said it wouldn't do instead of church on Sunday ; so I can tell Maria I won't ever go in to look at another when we're passing St. John's. I should have thought Cousin Leopold would have had more sense. But maybe he doesn't know the kind of thing it is

A WEDDING GOWN

—sitting for hours and hours in a horrid old seat, waiting for nothing at all to begin. Do you think they're making up the match now ? ”

“ Very belike, sir,” said Jim.

“ Perhaps some weddings are shorter than others,” said Mac. “ Anyhow, you know, I suppose, that it's with Maggie I'm making my match. Yesterday we were walking up and down the river-path, from the bridge to the wild cherry rock, six times before the others came ; that is three times up, and three times down, which makes six.”

“ Is it Maggie ? ” said Jim. “ Oh, bedad, she'll be presently too grand altogether to look the way anybody is ; that's what the end of it'll be—when they've married Quality.”

“ I don't think Maggie is a grand girl *at all*,” said Mac. “ Milady is a little grand, perhaps ; but Maggie's pretty, and uncommonly nice. Seems to me she looks the way anybody else is, if she wants to. Won't she look the way *you* are ? ”

Jim gave the mowing machine a sudden shove, which sent a geyser of chopped grass and daisies dancing into the air ; but it also cut down and mangled a very fine polyanthus, whose velvety bunch should by rights have been safely out of its track. “ There,” Mac

MAC'S ADVENTURES

said, pointing reproachfully to the wreck of purple and amber, "you've took it into a great many more pieces than it was put together with."

"A fine botch I've made of it, sure enough, sir," said Jim. "That's what comes of talkin' foolish about other people's business. It's nothin' to me whether she looks or no."

Leopold Rowan and Isabella Lonergan, at any rate could not be said to occupy themselves unduly about other people's business, as in those days they were most thoroughly engrossed by their own affairs, or rather, indeed, by a selection from them; for they gave scant heed to some things that are a matter of concern to ordinary mortals. Mrs. Lonergan declared to Maggie her belief that if they gave Isabella the chickens' bit of food for her breakfast she'd never notice the differ, but just sit looking out of the window, with her eyes shining like the stars and the blue night run together. And over at Glenmoreen, Mrs. O'Rourke more than once remarked upon the strange gentleman's habit of leaving all the letters that came for him by the post to lie on his chimneypiece for three or four days maybe at a time, without so much as opening an envelope. Circumstances favoured their self-absorption. The

A WEDDING GOWN

external world made itself unobtrusively agreeable to them, and had for thanks on their part, obliviousness. All the minor details of life at Baravon were pleasant through that gliding spring and summer. Fair weather beamed on the garden with its jewelled lawns, and crystal-twinkling fountains, and shadowy green paths leading down by the rush of clear, swift water. If a chance day of rain drove them indoors, it was not to be irksomely straitened and crowded. There was the old library, quiet and quaint and venerable ; and the hall, with white marble underfoot, and black Irish oak high overhead, cool and spacious ; and the big drawing-room, with its wide floor and great bowls of odorous roses. And the few supernumeraries in the drama played their parts with befitting insignificance, and neither meddled nor made.

The nearest approach to a jarring note was a little incident that happened on a radiant July afternoon. The young people set out for a walk along the river, and, as was their wont, Maggie and Mac lagged behind gathering the wild flowers successfully, and failing to capture any fish out of the pools wherein they splashed. Isabella and Leopold walked on longer and farther than they had ever done before, until

MAC'S ADVENTURES

they came to a turn in the winding stream which brought them to a place where they had in sight another bridge, some way ahead. Confronting them, on the opposite bank, stood a thatched cabin in a small, steep field. It was a miserable-looking dwelling, ruinous and weather-stained, with one little window huddled under the ragged eaves, and a low black door opening on a puddle. As they came by, out hobbled a lame old crone, wrapped in a tattered red shawl, with dishevelled white hair, and a wild demeanour. She made her way down to the river's edge, crying to them shrilly for money to keep her from starving. "The poor old creature's crazy, I believe," Leopold said, and he threw half a crown across to her. It fell just short, dropping into shallow water among the stones; and, although he threw another instead, they saw her as they turned homewards, still wading and stooping, and groping with her stick about the spot, and laughing and lamenting in a pitiful, childish sort of way over the disappointment of her quest. The sight of her and her hovel saddened Isabella with a melancholy that felt like a foreboding; and all the rest of the evening she was haunted by the remembrance of that rent roof cowering under a round-topped elder

A WEDDING GOWN

bush, and of its demented old mistress limping painfully in a greedily eager search for a coin. Yet when not many days later she heard Dick M'Cabe telling her mother that poor Mary Anne Clonisky, the cracked old woman who lived by herself down below near the Three-mile bridge, was after dying of a bad cold on her chest, that picture had faded from Isabella's memory, and she saw no thread of connection between herself and the ill-fated heroine of Dick's bit of news.

Weeks and months that pass unchequered by anything more seriously gloomy than a fleeting mood of melancholy may well be conjectured a time of serene brightness, when days slip by as smoothly as pearls on a silken string. So in the Baravon gardens ran the chronicle of fruits and flowers ; strawberries' scarlet dwindling away under their abundant greenery, and caught on the cheeks of ripening eve-apples ; geraniums and carnations burning in the wake of valley-lilies and violets, amid constellations of ever-faithful roses and pansies. There was no apparent reason why an end should come at all, except the inconsequent one that come it always does sooner or later. It arrived here at last on a day half-way through August, towards the "setting of summer all golden,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and sun's setting," when Leopold Rowan and Mac Barry said good-bye to their friends at Baravon House. Leopold had received, and ultimately opened, urgent letters reminding him of shooting engagements in Scotland, and about the same time it became convenient for Mac's aunts to entertain him at Scarborough. Hence Leopold's good nature was again requisitioned to provide an escort for the child, and they were to be travelling companions. Mac was sorry to go. He regretted primarily Maggie Lonergan and Jim M'Cabe, and secondarily almost everything else about the place, including the prickly bushes with their ample burden of honey-blobs, and those others that dangled juicy jet, and ruby and amber beads; and the sun-painted peaches on the glowing south wall. It was sad that his prospect of a return to all those delights should be merely a vague "one of these fine days."

Leopold's regrets were profounder and more concentrated; but then his absence was not to be of by any means such indefinite duration. He spoke with confidence of coming back in October at the latest; and his tone implied that he looked forward to the date as to a crisis in all their affairs. In fact, he had made up his mind to ascertain how the land lay

A WEDDING GOWN

among his kinsfolk before he put his fortune to the touch with Isabella. That he would do upon his return in any case ; but whether or no he would take them into his confidence must depend upon the result of his investigations. A shrunken and deserted-feeling group watched the two travellers away from the door, and out of sight down the long vista of the lime-tree avenue. Jim M'Cabe was driving them on the car ; and if he had been perfectly frank, might have said that he did so " with a heart and a half." However, he had the discretion to keep his sentiments to himself.

V

It may be remembered that Mac sustained a shock of disagreeable surprise on the occasion when his grandmother entrusted him with a present for Mrs. Lonergan's daughters. This now was to give him an opportunity for inflicting a much severer one upon not only his grandmother but several aunts, as well as other connections. On the very day of his arrival at Scarborough, the donor of the dolls happened to inquire how Mrs. Lonergan's little girls had liked them. Said Mac :

" She's got no little girls ; there aren't any

MAC'S ADVENTURES

brats about the place, glory be to God. She's only got Maggie and Milady, whose right name is Isabella, the same as Aunt Belle's ; but *she* won't be my aunt, but my cousin and my sister-in-law. They're as old as Aunt Amy, I should think, or very nearly. Milady's the beautiful one everybody says, but not in *my* opinion. Leopold can show you her photograph, for he took it a good many times with his kodak, and I heard him saying to her one day that he would have thought it an exquisite thing if he'd seen it first. He was never done talking and walking about with her. I should think they must have said the same things over and over again, which is very tiresome. Now Maggie and I made up our match without talking half as much. Maggie often says : ' Ay will I, bedad,' and ' How's yourself ? ' just like Jim M'Cabe, and so does Mrs. Lonergan ; but Milady never does. It's pretty vulgar, I think, and in my opinion vulgar people are much nicer than others. But, all the same, Milady'll do very well for a sister-in-law, and my cousin, which she'll be when she's married to Leopold."

" Oh, my dear child, don't talk such absurd nonsense," said Mac's grandmother and aunts.

" Nonsense ? " said Mac. " It's as sensible

A WEDDING GOWN

as anything can be. Why, everybody knows all about it. Jim M'Cabe says that Maggie'll be so set up with their family marrying into Quality, he supposes she won't look the same side of the road that anybody is. But I don't see that it's any great business of his even if she doesn't."

Mac's relatives listened to these, and many other such communications, with rapidly increasing dismay, which they masked under professions of incredulity, expressed, however, with a prudent regard to risks of stopping the source of further revelations by a huff on his part. His audience included Mrs. Gerald Barry, mother of Baravon's present owner, at that time an Eton boy. She was a vivacious, energetic little person, an old familiar friend of Leopold Rowan; and she now announced the daring intention of at once attacking him upon the subject, and finding out whether there was really anything in Mac's alarmingly circumstantial romance. This she proceeded to do without loss of time, which pressed urgently, and all through the hurried luncheon that preceded Leopold's start for the north, she plied him adroitly with insinuations, conjectures, and point-blank inquiries, all carefully kept in an atmosphere of jest, to

MAC'S ADVENTURES

prevent offence-taking, as undeveloped photograph films are kept from any save coloured light. But she failed to elicit any satisfactory result. Leopold was very far indeed from giving her the convincing denial that she had at the outset been fairly confident of obtaining ; on the contrary, he more than hinted that the tale-bearer Mac had not wholly misrepresented the state of affairs ; and when she had seen him off, she could only faint-heartedly attempt to reassure herself with a hope that he might have been just tormenting her all the while. The more she reflected upon this theory, the less tenable it seemed, and one fact about which she had no doubt, was that he proposed to revisit Glenmoreen in the autumn.

Her report, which she hastened to make, spread consternation among her family circle, and was immediately followed by a council of war. At it denunciations of Mrs. Lonergan and her daughters were the order of the day, and evidently an altogether futile one. For when Mac's grandmother had repeated several times that of course if you come to consider it, those girls must be grown up by now, but that she would never have thought it of Maggie Hanlon ; and when everybody else had assented, the situation seemed in no way altered.

A WEDDING GOWN

But Mrs. Gerald Barry again interposed, and this time with more effect. "Undoubtedly," she said, "these Lonergans must be bundled out of the place without delay. And I declare I don't see what we could do better than spend the next six months at Baravon ourselves—the children and I. The winters there are said to be much milder than at Bournemouth, which I was thinking of, and it would be far more economical. It would be just as well, too, to be at a quiet place for Grace's last winter *in* ; I find it so impossible to prevent her from constantly emerging on one pretext or another. Besides, it would be a good reason for getting rid of the Lonergan crew without any bother ; and if once they were safely out of it, the chances are that we should have no more trouble about them. From what Mac and Leopold himself say, I don't fancy there'll be any correspondence, but even if they did write to him, he'll be moving continually, so that ten to one the letter would miss him ; and if he wrote to Baravon, *that* would certainly be a dead letter. Really, everything considered, it seems to me the best plan."

Everybody agreed that it was, and in pursuance of it steps were taken before the sun went down, as a consequence of which the post

MAC'S ADVENTURES

a few mornings later brought a most amazing letter to Mrs. Lonergan at Baravon House. It enclosed a month's wages, and curtly informed her that Mrs. Barry, who would arrive there that day week, wished to find the house empty. Mrs. Lonergan received these commands with a stunned sort of indignation, and prepared to obey them straightway. So abrupt an ending to so long a period of faithful service struck her as outrageous, and unaccountable too, until she bethought her of possibilities connected with "Master Mac's talk"—a conjecture which explained things clearly and terribly. Maggie shared all her mother's feelings. But to Isabella the event seemed as if Paradise were suddenly shattered into ruins around them, and a thorny wilderness-world springing up into its place. They were obliged to face the change with scanty means of mitigating it. Mrs. Barry said not a word of any pension or prospect of further employment. When something of the kind was suggested, she had replied, "Oh, my dear, she must have made a fortune out of the place. If there was nothing else, look at the fruit in those gardens, year after year."

"She has sent over quantities of apples and pears, and jams, you know," some one admitted,

A WEDDING GOWN

“and really, I believe, without making any charge for carriage or pots.”

“It’s charitable to suppose that she had some faint glimmerings of conscience,” said Mrs. Barry.

The Lonergans’ first move was to Bantry, whither they were drawn by the matter of Maggie’s legacy. As ill-luck would have it, her fifty pounds, which would now have been such a stand-by, had become involved in litigation about a disputed will, and at length, after weeks of delay, only a small fraction of the sum reached the legatee’s hands. To Isabella it was a time of misery intense and new. Her transfer from the spacious chambers and pleasant lawns of Baravon to cramped and squalid lodgings in a dingy little street, was an experience she could never have imagined. The wilderness, she found, was not only thorny, but dirty, and smoky, and noisy. By and by, as the season waned, nipping cold was added to its distresses. Amid these unprecedented hardships Isabella drooped and dwindled so perceptibly and progressively that her mother and sister, having done what little they could to shield her from them, contemplated her with chagrin and dismay. Yet all three of them looked forward hopefully to the lifting

MAC'S ADVENTURES

of these clouds at no very distant day—the day of Leopold Rowan's return. Her late repulse by the Family had indeed to some extent shaken Mrs. Lonergan's confidence ; but the defection of strangers over-seas could not cause Maggie any distrust of their summer friend—a presence so familiar through the long, bright months ; and Isabella's faith never swerved, though it did fail to fortify her against the physical effects of their hard times. She was not even conscious of counting upon deliverance from penury and exile as a result of their meeting ; it seemed to her that all she wanted was to see him once more.

This hope was what brought mother and daughters back to Glenmoreen when the woods were being gilt and stained in October. But to each other they spoke only about chances of finding some employment. And then followed a weary waiting, in dismal quarters, while their little store of money ebbed away, and doubt swelled up into despair. For of Leopold Rowan nothing was seen or heard. Mrs. Barry had rightly conjectured no correspondence on the Lonergans' part ; and she was right also about the fate of a letter which he ignorantly sent to Baravon House, apprising them that his return had been slightly post-

A WEDDING GOWN

poned. Nobody there knew whither to forward it. The M'Cabes had been dismissed, and the servants were all new-comers. It was tossed aside and lost.

One day of bitter frost about Christmas time, Mrs. Lonergan made a desperate expedition to Clondroon, the nearest village to Baravon. Her objects were a possible job of needlework, and a visit to some old acquaintances from whom she thought she might learn something about the Barry family. In the matter of the sewing, disappointment was her portion; but worse than disappointment resulted from her interview with the Fottrells. The news she carried away with her confirmed all her strongest fears, and was a crushing, chilling load on her long trudge back through the bleak twilight and nightfall to Glenmoreen. She had not the heart to tell even Maggie; it was such a cold evening, and her walk had been so tiresome. So she tried vainly to win a happy look from Isabella by means of a couple of wizened oranges that she had bought for her out of their long home in a window-pane; and then she sought her bed, to leave it but once more. For she had taken a chill, and in three days was dead.

At this blackest hour in their lives, the one

MAC'S ADVENTURES

piece of forbearance that fate seemed to show towards the sisters was in allowing Dominic Fottrell to offer them a rent-free loan of the old empty cabin, vacated by poor Mary Anne Clonisky, away at the Three-mile bridge. It was not six months since Isabella had walked there with Leopold Rowan through the summer shadow and sun ; but she had had time to wander a terribly long way from their former fortunes—almost as far as poor Mary Anne. And now a dark and fearful chasm, never to be crossed, had opened behind them. Maggie accepted old Dominic's kindness with gratitude. The funeral had left them almost penniless. As she looked at Isabella sitting white and apathetic, she often said to herself : " What'll I do at all at all, when I'm the only one in this world ? "

VI

The news which had gloomed upon Mrs. Lonergan's last days told her that Leopold Rowan, having arrived at Baravon House towards the end of October, had been staying there, off and on, ever since. And her inference was that all the while he never had really thought anything of Isabella : " For how else

A WEDDING GOWN

could it be that not a foot of him had come next or nigh them?" But she was mainly mistaken. Leopold had walked into the hall at Baravon fully expecting to find the party he had left there last August, and instead, he was welcomed by his widowed cousin Eva Barry, with a cordiality which was quite genuine, and a surprise the amount of which was somewhat exaggerated. She assumed insistently that his visit had all along been intended for her, and utterly declined to hear of his not having come to stay. A messenger had driven off to Glenmoreen for Mr. Rowan's traps, before Mr. Rowan well knew what was happening. The spectral white mists trailing in the background, and the clammy drizzle that made the air grey nearer at hand, helped to second her protests against his turning away from the warm and lightsome interior.

Then Mrs. Barry took care that in the course of the evening he should be made aware of certain things in a casual sort of way. The old housekeeper—Leopold might remember her—had been found so unsatisfactory in some respects that it was necessary to get rid of her. She and her daughters had left the neighbourhood some time ago, and had gone to the south. So far Mrs. Barry related what she

MAC'S ADVENTURES

supposed to be facts, for she did not know that the Lonergans had just returned to Glenmoreen. Their gardeners, she mentioned further, people named M'Kay or M'Cabe, had also been dispensed with. She believed that one of them was engaged, if not actually married, to the younger daughter—the girl Leopold had admired so much—and that the whole party had emigrated from Queenstown. The belief which Mrs. Barry had attained to in this case was, strictly speaking, merely a strong conviction that such an arrangement would be very convenient and desirable; a conviction which in the hopeful mind may produce a sense of probability high enough to justify the use of the prophetic perfect tense, the wish being thus grandfather to the assertion.

However, Leopold was not allowed to depend upon the affairs of the Lonergan family for his entertainment. Many other distractions were provided for him. The party at Baravon House was a gay and agreeable one. It included Mrs. Barry's father, an elderly person, who turned a wide knowledge of the world into lively conversation, with a cheerful and pleasant humour which had been in a large measure inherited by his daughter and

A WEDDING GOWN

hostess. Her flock of pretty little girls were never permitted to tax the good nature that made their society in moderation an acceptable amusement to Leopold ; but of much more moment was the eldest and only grown-up daughter of the house.

Grace Barry, whose friends not unreasonably predicted that she would shine a star among the *débutantes* of the coming season, possessed, together with the freshness of seventeen, gifts of shrewd observation and insight, which often lent a piquant unexpectedness to her talk, while she had a tact and taste which made her unexpectedness almost always charming. Her singing was delightful to more critical people than Leopold ; and in all manner of sports and pastimes she showed a dainty sort of proficiency that might have been learned from athletic elves. At the time when Leopold and she were first acquainted, she had acquired few of these accomplishments, and they had finally parted on the very worst terms, by reason of a dispute about the feeding of rabbits. But that was a dozen years ago, and neither of them now wished to keep up the quarrel, bitterly though she had once resented his refusal to let her fill the hutch with leaves of poisonous cow-parsley. During some snowstormy weeks

MAC'S ADVENTURES

towards Christmas-tide, they made considerable progress in restoring amity ; Leopold, indeed, was so deeply occupied in this way, that he thought less and less about the girl with whom he had never quarrelled at all. And when, on the approach of spring, the climate of Baravon was found to be too damp, he took part in the consequent flitting of the Barrys to Algiers. And by the time the sun had begun to shine too hotly upon the palms and oranges and aloes, those ancient enemies were an engaged couple. The arrangement was made with much less preliminary walking and talking than that upon which Mac had animadverted as excessive in the case of the girl to whom Leopold of course never had engaged himself at all, and in connection with whom any such notion now seemed absurd enough. So Grace's mother said, writing home the news ; but she owned in addition that she felt luckier than lucky at having got it safely settled before the season, when you never can tell what may happen to anybody.

Last summer and Baravon looked a long way off, yet next summer, speeding rapidly near, would bring back Baravon again, for at Baravon the wedding was to be. Grace had taken a fancy to the little old ivied church among the

A WEDDING GOWN

firs looking down on the river, and she saw visions of a picturesque bridal procession on foot through the descending lawns, and across the arched bridge, and up the steep shady path. August was the time fixed.

In August, therefore, a large wedding house-party began to assemble under the many-gabled roof of Baravon. Among the guests were Mac and his parents. Mac was well pleased to revisit a place of which he retained very happy reminiscences, and he expected the reality to correspond with them in the minutest details, having yet to learn from experience that we not only never drink twice of the same stream, but find our successive draughts of different, and generally inferior, flavours. He met with no exception now to this rule. Changes were sundry and manifold, and all for the worse. His old friends, including his especial cronies Jim M'Cabe and Maggie Lonergan, had all departed, and nobody knew anything about them except that they certainly were not coming back. And as most sorry substitutes, he found what he described as "a lot of horrid little squeaking girls, always running about wherever a person was." He repelled every advance on the side of these intrusive young people with a solemn and stern disapproval,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

which impressed and discouraged them ; and he resentfully scouted the suggestion that they might be appropriate companions for him. Still, he could not avoid being thrown into their unworthy society to an extent that was irksome and *infra dig.* Even the weather exhibited the prevalent marks of deterioration, being often gloomy and wet, so that he could not escape out of doors. His mother was more than once embarrassed by the impossibility of restraining his public utterance of a wish that Grace would make haste with her old wedding, and let them go home. But a most serious affront befell him before the appointed day arrived.

It happened on a showery morning, the greater part of which he had been obliged to spend in the house. One of the few interesting occurrences that had relieved its tedium was the driving up to the hall door of a temerarious tinker's donkey-cart, accompanied by a troop of tatterdemalion children. Mac, who with the despicable little girls watched from the breakfast-room window the rout of this disreputable party, improved the occasion by assuring Kathleen and Norah and Maud that when they grew up into aunts, their nephews and nieces would be just like the children out

A WEDDING GOWN

there with the cart, only perhaps "blackier-looking and more raggeder." This prophecy was received by Kathleen and Norah with shrill incredulity, but Maud, weaker-spirited and simpler-minded, bewailed with dismal howling the prospect of such extremely unattractive connections. Thereupon some of the elders who were present interposed to restore concord, or at least tranquillity, and good-natured old Aunt Cherry, thinking to create a timely diversion, called Mac to come and look at something very pretty. Mac came, mistrustingly, and was shown a coloured fashion-plate, on which a small boy in fantastic pink and silver garments appeared to be wading among wild surges of white tulle and lace. "There, my dear," said Aunt Cherry, "that's a picture of the pretty dress your kind grand-mamma's sending over for you to wear at the wedding—if you are a good child. Kathleen and her sisters will be bridesmaids, you know, in sweet little blue silk sacs; but you are to be a little page, and help dear little Aylmer O'Sullivan to carry your cousin Grace's beautiful long white satin train. Won't that be nice? Do you see what fine lace ruffles he has, and lovely little pink shoes with silver buckles?"

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Mac looked, fortunately, unutterable things for a moment at this object of admiration. Then he said deliberately, "If she *will* wear her gown too long, and wants somebody to keep it from streeling through the puddles, of course I can hold it up for her. And if my hands were very exceedingly dirty and black-marky, I wouldn't mind washing them. And if my boots was most extrornarly muddy, a great deal worse than these ones"—he protruded a toe which might, not without reason, have been considered quite sufficiently admired—" *perhaps* I would change them. But as for supposing or imagining that a person would ever go and dress himself up like that odious, disgusting, detestful-looking little wretch—may the Saints have my sowl if I'll do any such a thing." And with that he stumped firmly away, leaving behind him dismay at his resolution as well as at the terms in which it was expressed. For ornamental small boys happened just then to be rather scarce, and the securing of Mac's services had been a chief object in his invitation. However, most people assented to Aunt Cherry's opinion, which was, that a little coaxing would soon bring him round when the time came.

A WEDDING GOWN

VII

But before it did come, so much had gone wrong with the arrangements for the wedding, that Mac's recalcitrancy seemed a trivial drop in a flood of mischances. The inclemency of the weather was at the bottom of all these troubles. It grew steadily worse as the fateful Tuesday, the Fifteenth, drew near, and, for the week preceding, rain incessantly fell. Baravon is a place where the effects of such excesses made themselves annoyingly felt, because the house was cut off from more inhabited regions by the river, and in wet seasons the river had a habit of promiscuously dashing over bridges, sometimes so much to their detriment as entirely to sever the connection laboriously established by mason and engineer. Now the Avonbawn was daily waxing more reckless and headlong in its course. The sound of its throbbing tramp reached far up into the sodden woods above it, where the mists that perpetually haunted them looked like the ghost of its white seething. On every side torrents were tumbling down to swell it with swirls of foam, and high up on Slieve Crieven the waterfall overspread the broad face of the cliff with a sheet of snow. People said that

MAC'S ADVENTURES

there must be a powerful weight of water above in it, and that unless the weather took up very presently, the Avonbawn was apt to be doing more than a little mischief in the country.

And, true for them, on the morning of the day but one before the wedding, Leopold, who, with his best man, Vaughan Creighton, was staying at a friend's house over the stream, came early across to bring inconvenient intelligence. The road-bridge had sustained such serious damage from the floods in the night, that its repair would be a matter of weeks, during which time the church would be accessible only on foot to the inmates of Baravon House. Their own bridge, with its high-pitched Gothic arch and massive piers, seemed perfectly safe, which was lucky, as they had no other means of communication. This news caused general concern, but it did not altogether displease the bride-elect. She had reluctantly given up her project of a walking wedding, as too likely to clash with a downpour. Now it had become a necessary step, prudent or no, and they must hope for a dry hour. At that moment no rain was falling, and Tuesday night, of course, be beautifully fine. Grace was disposed to take

A WEDDING GOWN

optimistic views, and when the puddles began to dance again, pronounced it to be only the clearing shower.

But a little later in the day she received news of another disaster so much more serious that it wrecked all her faith in future good fortune, and enveloped her in a gloom which would not have been dispelled by a promise of the most appropriately brilliant sunshine. Among the untoward circumstances that had menaced the success of her bridal pageant had been the non-arrival of the flower and sum of her trousseau—the wedding gown. About this supreme creation Madame Floribel had showed herself even less punctual than is her wont; however, anxiety had at length been allayed by a telegram authentically announcing its actual despatch; and Michael Dermody, who had driven over to fetch it from Glasmartin railway station, might now be expected at any time, even allowing for delays on the bad roads. Whereupon Michael, appearing in the mid-afternoon, was the bearer of nothing save evil tidings. Away below, a bit beyond the Three-mile bridge, his doleful story ran, the chestnut had taken upon herself to shy at a couple of people riding home double from Mass, and had backed the car over the steep

MAC'S ADVENTURES

bank slap into the river, that was ragin' mad and leppin' out of its skin. By the greatest luck of all, he himself got just time to fall head foremost into a furze-bush; but the mare was drowned, let alone breakin' her back, and the car was smashed into sticks, and swep' away in the flood, wid every ha'porth on it. "Ay, bedad, your ladyship, the big wicker hamper affair too—all bet to bits, and swallied up like a wisp of hay—such destruction was never witnessed."

Here was a calamity overwhelming and irreparable. Grace could hardly feel that the tragedy of it would have been deepened if Mickey had shared the freakish chestnut's fate in the wild waters, which were now being robed with her shimmering satin and delicate tulle. She could scarcely realise that it was at all mitigated by the consideration to which Mrs. Barry referred with gratitude, saying: "Oh, my dear child, isn't it a mercy that we decided not to use your godmother's flounces for the skirt?" It seemed to her that everything was ruined. What would a wedding be without a wedding gown! At first, in fact, she declared that it was impossible, and must be put off until they could procure another. The idea of a postponement did not by any

A WEDDING GOWN

means suit her mother, for several reasons, among which the expense of a new creation was not without weight. But it was only after much remonstrance, entreaty, and persuasion, in which the transfer of a long-coveted set of opals played a part, that Grace yielded the point, and consented to appear on the happy occasion in her travelling costume of biscuit-coloured bengaline. She still averred that she did not care a pin about it now, and would just as soon not be married at all. A heavy cloud brooded over the household.

If they had but known, the missing garment all the while was not very far away, and not much the worse for its voyaging amid the turbulent eddies of the Avonbawn. That voyaging had been brief and scathless—Michael Dermody's "all bet to bits" was simply a picturesque flight of fancy—and the dress-basket had found a haven among some high-lying boulders just in front of the little cabin with its clump of elder-bushes, which had a twelve-month ago sheltered old Mary Anne Clonisky's crazy head, and was now inhabited by Maggie and Isabella Lonergan.

This daily-dripping summer had been a season of care-haunted loneliness and sorrowful straits to the sisters, or rather to Maggie,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

for Isabella's absorbing grief seemed to lap away from her all the details of trouble, as the wide waves, where the river was fullest, hid every rocky crest under one smooth mantling of foam. If food and fire should fail her, she would little heed the lack of them among all that she had lost. But Maggie, whose affliction was less bewildering and strange to her, could not forbear concern about means of subsistence, the attainment to which grew more and more a difficult problem. Now and then she solved it temporarily by getting a job of sewing, and would bring home a bundle of needlework, over which she and Isabella toiled hugely for a few pennies' pay. Hitherto, however, their main support had been derived from the sale of their small personal property. Isabella's wardrobe was larger than is common with maidens of her rank, for her mother had been deftly industrious in supplying her with dainty apparel, and was seldom without some embroidery in hand for the embellishment of the soft white robes that had been her favourite wear in the summer pleasance at Baravon. All these pretty things Maggie now sold to an eager-looking Jewish couple who had a second-hand clothes stall at Killeek fair; but the money they brought in drew towards an end

A WEDDING GOWN

as steadily as the summer, and at the beginning of August she was thinking uneasily about their prospects of getting through the winter.

Isabella herself was another cause of anxiety. In the milder weather she regained the beauty that had drooped during the hardest times, but it was such a very fragile bloom that it struck even casual and inexperienced beholders as ominous. On one of their rare fine days, one of their few and far-off neighbours happened to pass by where Isabella was sunning herself on a stone beside the stream. "Whethen now, girl alive, is it waitin' there you are for a weeny breath of win' to come and blow you away?" Mrs. Ryan said, and walked on smiling at her own conceit, which left a sting of dread in Maggie's heart. It incited her to procure a visit from the doctor, who told her that if they were not very careful, her sister would probably have an attack of nervous fever, with small chance of recovery; and as he had no practicable precautions to suggest, his opinion was not reassuring. About this time also, she heard how Miss Barry above at Baravon was "just about getting married to young Mr. Rowan, him that used to be stopping at Glenmoreen last summer." Maggie had long since abandoned all hope with regard to Leopold Rowan,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and she trusted that, as Isabella seldom saw any one, the news might not reach her. Still, the certainty and the risk provided additional matter for regret and apprehension.

Thus Maggie had many things troubling her mind on the Sunday when she trudged off alone through the rain to early Mass at Connelbeg, and when on the road home, who should come running after her, and shake the two hands nearly off her, saying : “ Och, Maggie Loner-gan, *alanna*, and what way are you this great while ? ”—but Jim M‘Cabe himself ? Jim’s former doubts whether she would “ look the way he was ” proved quite erroneous, for, to tell the truth, she looked at him much as she might have done at an angel come shining to unlock the gate into a long-shut-up garden of Eden, while she listened to his story of the bad luck that had followed him for months after they had left Baravon, and of how he had now at last got a grand place with good wages in the County Fermanagh, which was the reason he had come to see Maggie. Just to remind her that they were still on the unweeded side of the gate, she was indeed obliged to tell him about their sorrowful loss. And then she found that after seeing Isabella with her over-brilliant eyes, and listless, restless

A WEDDING GOWN

ways, Jim too was impressed by a melancholy change. "I wouldn't say, Maggie," he replied to a question, "but Milady's gown somethin' wakely lookin' to what she was. I dunno how it is, rightly, but she's like to me as if the blossom of a flower had a sort of fire-flame burnin' through it, that's not accordin' to nature." Jim's diagnosis was not very encouraging either; nevertheless his reappearance seemed to Maggie a most joyful one, and she could not help believing that all things would now begin to mend.

Important events are apt to occur in a series; and so the next day was marked by Maggie's discovery of the tossed-up dress-basket among the boulders, where it had been lying for more than four-and-twenty hours. She tugged it up to their door, and tried vainly to arouse Isabella's interest in speculations about its contents. But she was glad of her failure, when she saw what these were. For she felt instinctively that a sight of this wonderful, glistening, snowy thing would be to Isabella as fuel to the longing and regret that consumed her for the sake of the lost old days when she herself, clad in white, inhabited a garden world with a mother and a lover in it. So Maggie hurried over her inspection, just noting

MAC'S ADVENTURES

that there were no traces of injury, except on one breadth of the skirt, where the gloss of the satin was dimmed by a little patch of damp ; and then she made haste to restore it to its elaborate wrappings, and stowed the hamper away in a corner beside the dresser. She intended to make inquiries about it on the first opportunity.

VIII

The morning of the Fifteenth found many anxious lookers-out for signs of fine weather, some on account of their deluged harvest-fields; some because it was a great holiday ; others for more miscellaneous reasons, and among these were included the household at Baravon. For although the day's ceremony had been despoiled of its most distinctive features, and the bride bereft of her ornaments could not forget to bewail them, it yet seemed desirable that the sun should shine, or, at any rate, that downpours should not descend, upon the wedding. But all these observers, whether bent upon business or pleasure, were disappointed by what they saw. The face of the sky wore a murky gloom. It was for the most part lead-coloured, and its highest lights nowhere suggested anything less lack-lustre than

A WEDDING GOWN

tarnished tin. Fitful gusts of a boisterous north wind brought up heavy clouds whose blackness made their grey background lividly pallid by contrast, and under this canopy the vivid hues of grass and flowers looked hard, crude, and garish, during the intervals when driven showers ceased to blur and extinguish all the glowing green and red.

Grace surveyed this cheerless scene rather indifferently ; she felt out of conceit with the whole affair in a discouragingly premature sort of way. Her little sister's feelings were more acute, seeing that with the bridal robe had vanished all their bridesmaids' glory, and nothing apparently was to happen but a flat and commonplace church-going in no exceptional attire. Mac's contemporary, Aylmer O'Sullivan, was amply consoled for his suppressed pageship by becoming the hopeful spectator of preparations for a wedding breakfast that promised to prove a most satisfactory success. But Mac himself, haunted by fears that his elders might still be harbouring insensate designs about his toilet, determined to frustrate them by slipping clandestinely out of doors. This he contrived to do in the course of the morning, and made his way through the pleasure, where much-battered geraniums gleamed,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and tall hollyhocks and lilies lay broken, down to the banks of the river, which he heard plunging and roaring under the shelter of the trees. There he might lie perdu and dabble enjoyably. It was not yet nearly time for the wedding, as the latest possible hour had been chosen, to give the weather a chance of improving after noon.

Away at the Three-mile bridge, on the contrary, Maggie Lonergan had business that it behoved her to get through as early as she could. She wanted to attend Mass, and to report at the police barracks the waif she had picked up, and she wished to do both errands before her sister awoke. Isabella had been restless all the night, until she took a draught given her by Dr. Allen, and she was now in a deep sleep which was likely to hold her for several hours. So Maggie hurried off.

But very soon afterwards Isabella awakened, and one of the first things that she noticed, as she looked round the room for Maggie, was the strange large hamper. She had scarcely heeded it last night, but now she opened it, and drew out with a shock of surprise the sheeny silken folds. Their delicate softness and whiteness seemed to her a glorified version of the gowns she had been fond of wearing in old summer

A WEDDING GOWN

times at home before her life was wrecked ; she could almost fancy that this was one of them. For a while she stood fingering it and dreaming ; and presently she found herself putting it on instead of her coarse black serge. By the time that she had fastened all its fine little buttons and hooks and ribbons, there had come over her a dreamier sense of nearness to the old days and places, and when she had tied the last knot, she wandered out of the house with a vague half-belief that she would be stepping back into the beloved garden at Bar-avon. But in reality she saw no vestiges of the past except the river, which had always been her familiar companion. Its aspect and voice were a forlorn sort of consolation, and as she looked and listened, a mingling of remembrance and forgetfulness made her think confusedly that she was on the wrong side of it, and that if she could cross over, all might be well again.

With this dimly in her mind, she began to walk along the bank, lured on partly by the sight and sound of the rushing water, and partly by a more remote vision of reaching a bridge. The footpath was fairly smooth, and generally strewn with the fir-needles of the grove which it threaded. Winding softly up

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and down, it bent aside here and there from the river for a little way ; and now and then Isabella had to follow a higher track between the stems, because the lower one was flooded. When she came to such places she made as much haste as she could, uneasily, as if she had lost a friend's company ; but her progress was slow, being greatly impeded by her trained skirt, which she painfully kept from trailing on the damp ground, and catching on the rough tree-trunks. Sometimes, too, she stumbled over straggling roots, because she was looking on further before her in expectation of a bridge. She walked on thus for a long way, so very long that it grew into a reason for continuing ; but no bridge spanned the wild white river. The sweeping roar of it in her ears helped to make her dizzy and bewildered. Her memory faltered and lapsed, wavering in and out like the moon's light among cloud-drifts. Sometimes she thought she heard old voices calling to her from the opposite bank, and then suddenly recollecting how that could not be, would turn away with bitter grief. If anybody had fallen in with her among those shadowy paths, he might have had little difficulty in imagining that he had lit upon some eerie place, subject from

A WEDDING GOWN

olden times to the hauntings of a tearful and dishevelled bride.

At long last, however, she did come to Bar-avon bridge, which she hastened across in a trance of oblivious hope. It deepened when, a few paces further on, she caught sight of little Mac Barry sitting in his favourite nook among the wet boulders above the deep pool beyond one of the piers. For that moment she felt quite certain of soon finding all the others again, and she ran towards him calling his name delightedly. What Mac may have imagined or supposed on this occasion, is best known to himself. What he did, as he saw the swiftly approaching cloud of floating, filmy draperies, all colourless save for a fleck of soft dark tresses, was to stand very erect on the flat top of a stone, and remark loudly and defiantly: "There isn't any such things as ghosts. So there's no good in dressing up and pretending. Only it might frighten a person who didn't know any better, and people oughtn't ever"— But his moral reflections were cut short and remained unfinished. For before she came within reach of him, this doubtfully canny visitor, girl or spectre, tripped somehow, and, losing her balance, fell over into the dark, eddying pool.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

She cried out, and tried to save herself by clutching at an overhanging snowberry-bough, but the small brittle twigs snapped in her hand, and no one of more avail than little Mac Barry seemed to be within hearing. He had the sense not to wade out further than he could keep his footing, and he grasped her long, floating skirt, and attempted to drag her on shore thereby, a feat, of course, far beyond his powers. However, he prevented her from being at once swept out into the fierce main current by the waves that ever and anon came weltering through the pool, dashing roughly over the dark head as it sank lower and lower. And he called at the top of his voice, interspersing his shouts with uncomplimentary animadversions upon the conduct of people who always were bothering about everywhere else in the world except the place where a person wanted them. It was an unequal struggle, and could be but brief.

Just at this time, a bridegroom and his best man were strolling down from the church towards the bridge, to see if there were any signs of a party leaving the house. The appointed time had come very near, and Leopold Rowan conversed with a disjointed fatuity, treated by his companion with a tolerant forbearance.

A WEDDING GOWN

Suddenly Vaughan Creighton said : " By Jove—did you hear that ? " To whom Leopold, laughing unmirthfully, replied something about the bell beginning to ring. " Oh, nonsense," said Creighton, " it's some one in the river " ; and he set off running. Then again came the cry, in a voice that Leopold recognised this time : and despite Creighton's start, Leopold it was who jumped first off the bridge-steps into the pool, to relieve the wrathful and unornate train-bearer of his office.

" There ! finely you've splashed us," Mac complained hypercritically. " Flumping down that way, as if a person couldn't have held her plenty long enough for you to come round properly."

As he stood knee-deep in swirling foam that tugged and clamoured at him, while the girl whom he had believed at the other side of the Atlantic clung to him with a drowning grip, Leopold's last year seemed melting away till past and present were mixed in a misty sort of dream. Its strangeness so preoccupied him that when he carried Isabella to the bank, he was half unconscious of his surroundings. He scarcely noticed that Maggie Lonergan and Jim M'Cabe had just come up panting and breathless from a long run. He was quite un-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

aware that the bridal procession, with umbrellas and waterproofs, had emerged from an adjacent shrubbery. His mind was wholly given to watching the light of life steal back into Isabella's face, when Creighton sought to interrupt him, calling to him at his elbow, with a loudness made necessary by the brawling of the Avonbawn, which seemed to muffle every other sound. "She's all right now," Creighton said, "come along, Rowan, for Heaven's sake. Miss Barry's waiting, and there's no time to lose, if there's to be a wedding to-day."

"To-day?" Leopold said vaguely, without looking round. "Why, you see, of course it can't be to-day."

Perhaps he was not really quite sure what wedding he meant. There was no uncertainty, however, in the mind of one spectator, as she looked down on him from a point of vantage on the bridge—a girl in a grey cloak, with a vivid brunette colouring, and delicate aquiline profile shown under her large plumed hat, which the raindrops were pelting maliciously. "Not to-day, indeed," Grace Barry called clearly above the hoarse accompaniment of the river, "nor any other day so far as I am concerned. And in my opinion it's highly absurd to be getting here drenched. Come,

A WEDDING GOWN

Kathleen and Norah, see who'll get home first," she said, and darting past her grandfather, who tried to stop her, she sped up the slope, followed by the little girls, in a race which she won.

"Glory be to goodness," observed Mac complacently, "I don't believe there's going to be any old plague of a wedding after all."

"I wonder," anxiously said his cousin Aylmer, surveying the situation with equal promptitude from another point of view, "I wonder now will they go and not have the breakfast."

Although things appeared to be somewhat intricately involved on that wet afternoon at Baravon, it so happened that before very long no less than three couples "sorted themselves" from among the persons there present. One of these matches was regarded with profound dissatisfaction by the bridegroom's family. Mrs. Gerald Barry generally spoke of it as "that wretched boy Leopold's Ophelia-folly." She was not at all too well pleased either, when her daughter Grace decided to become the wife of Vaughan Creighton, for though she admitted him to be a very nice fellow, his means were miserably moderate. About the third pair she would not have thought it worth

MAC'S ADVENTURES

while to form an opinion. Yet if the faculty of "knowing one's own mind" is a prognostication of happiness, the prospects of Mr. and Mrs. Leopold Rowan, and of Captain and Mrs. Vaughan Creighton, might have been considered on the whole less brilliant than those of Jim and Mrs. Jim M'Cabe.

*THE FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL
BEASTS*

The Field of the Frightful Beasts

MAC BARRY bore a heavy weight on his mind through a part of his summer at Clonmanavon, which, being only the sixth one in his life, seemed to him a season with remotest beginning and end. He was visiting his great-grandmother, Mrs. Kavanagh, who for each of his years could have given a baker's dozen of her own, and still have had several left over ; and through the glowing July days the old lady worked away, steadily and swiftly, at sundry woollen garments, sometimes expressing a fear, as her needles clicked, that she would hardly have them all ready for the boys before the cold weather began. The youngest of these boys would never see fifty again, and Mrs. Kavanagh knitted the faster whenever she thought of her Johnnie's rheumatism. To Mac, on the contrary, it never occurred at this time that the days were ever going to be otherwise than warm and long, with hummings in the sunshiny air ; neither did he

MAC'S ADVENTURES

concern himself about anybody's tendency to aches and stiffness. His cares had a quite different cause.

It was one of his great-grandmother's household laws that he should every morning take a walk, attended by Kate Heron, the housemaid ; and Kate, duly carrying out this decree, would fain have supplemented it with another, to the effect that their walk should always bring them along Madden's Lane. For that thick-hedged thoroughfare ran past no less than two little dwellings, towards whose dark half-doors her feet instinctively turned. And on their first few walks she met with no opposition to her wishes. Mac, knowing nothing about the topography of the neighbourhood, had not any alternative routes to prefer, and was content to amuse himself with the shaggy-coated small terrier, Gaby, while Kate's large flowery hat bobbed in deep conference with emerging shawled heads, or vanished altogether for a few minutes, diving into shadows beneath the shock of thatch and wavering blue smoke plume. But one morning, when they were on their way home, and had come near the corner of the road which was only a hundred yards or so from his great-grandmother's gate, Mac made a very dreadful discovery.

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

He happened to glance up at the top of the wall along which they were passing. A very high old stone wall it was ; three, or perhaps four, superimposed Macs would scarcely have reached to a level with its parapet, yet over it he saw projecting the heads of two cows and a sorrel pony gazing down calmly into the road. The sight filled him with dismay ; in fact, he was almost startled into betraying horrified surprise. " My goodness, Kate ! " he began, forgetting his dignity so far as to pull the fringe of her amber-bordered brown shawl.

" What ails you at all, Master Mac ? " Kate said, recalled from some rather far-off meditations of her own. However, he recovered his self-possession in time.

" Nothin' ails anybody," he replied stiffly. " I was only wonderin' why they can't find somethin' better to do than to stand there gapin' at everybody that passes on the road, which is no concern of theirs."

" Ah, the crathurs ! " Kate responded absently.

What had really struck him was the thought of how prodigious must be the stature of the beasts to whom those prying heads appertained. For how otherwise could they look over that great immense wall, as high nearly as the house?

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Mac, all unversed in Rabbinical legend, had never gauged "the just dimensions of the giant Og," and recked nought of colossal storks wading with immeasurable legs ; which was doubtless well for his peace of mind, since such lore would have revealed portentous abysses to his imagination. Even as it was, he stood gravely aghast. Towards all animals his sentiments had hitherto been most friendly and fearless ; but that somehow seemed only to aggravate the present circumstances, making more odious the belief that the attractive and estimable tribes of horses and cattle had stalking among them creatures of proportions so unsightly and grotesque. The fact, however, could not be doubted. When he passed that way, there almost invariably he saw ranged a row of heads fearsomely far above his own, the more placid and contemplative wearing immobile horns ; the more alert and observant twitching sensitive ears. Mac wondered whether it was their legs, or their necks, or both, that were so preternaturally elongated ; but he felt that in any case they must be hideous to behold, and he shuddered inwardly at the notion of what nightmare-like shapes those interposing stones must screen. Once, indeed, he fancied that he caught a glimpse of something like the head

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

of what ought to have been a very *little* girl appearing over the edge in a flappy white sun-bonnet ; but the figure which this compelled him to imagine was so monstrous that he hastily averted his eyes, and tried to persuade himself that they had deceived him.

Of course, he mentioned the matter to nobody. Self-respecting children never do confide their haunting terrors to elders, possibly derisive of them. No chance of gaining coveted protection and deliverance from the torment of fear can justify one in running the risk of appearing ignorantly ridiculous to those who presumably know all about everything. So Mac preserved a scrupulous silence, in which his alarms had ample scope to root themselves. The nearest approach he ever made to the subject was once, when he remarked to Tim Brennan, the coachman, as they were driving over Clonmanavon Bridge—he had only just forgiven Tim's offer to let him hold the end of the reins—" I suppose, now, you never see cows walkin' about here who are so tall they couldn't fit in under that arch ? "

Unluckily, Tim took the question as a sort of challenge, and replied, " Well, sir, I wouldn't say that the most we keep hereabouts couldn't make a shift to get through it middlin' aisy for

MAC'S ADVENTURES

any size there is on them. Not but what I've seen an odd one now and again might be very apt to stick half-ways, unless they was after takin' a bit off of the horns of her—ay, she would so. We've plinty of powerful big cattle in Clonmanavon."

This answer gave cold comfort to Mac, who had hoped to elicit an assurance that abnormally huge quadrupeds were at any rate extremely rare in the neighbourhood, and exclusively confined to the one gruesome place which he called in his thoughts "The Field of the Frightful Beasts." Failing in this, he could not tell but that many of them might be at large close by, and the continual likelihood of falling in with one spread a heavy cloud over all his open-air hours. The dread seized possession of him, and grew more harassing every day. He was constantly peering through gates and gaps to see whether they led into pastures infested with uncanny herds. When the click-clack of horses' hoofs sounded on the road, he scarcely dared look at what was coming, lest it should prove to be a steed with spidery legs and snaky neck, shaped like the ungainly shadows thrown when the low sun is drawing caricatures.

It was quite natural that the actual sight of

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

the wall with its frieze of protruded heads, which were sometimes so numerous that he could not well count them, should have the effect of intensifying these detestable impressions; and Mac's experience being such, he very soon began to shrink from turning the corner that brought them into view. Kate Heron presently found herself wondering: "What at all had set Master Mac agin walkin' anywheres except Crumloughlin ways, that was no better than an ugly boggy ould bit of a boreen, wid nothin' in it good or bad to bring anybody trapesin' there." But she wondered to little purpose, as Mac did not feel called upon to offer any explanation for his new departure. In the course of his only-childhood he had acquired independent and masterful habits, and he now saw no reason why he should not choose his own way. Therefore he set a resolute face northward every morning, calling, "Hi, along this way," to Gaby, who generally bolted in the wrong direction, and replying decisively to Kate's proposed amendments, "No, my friend, that other's a horribominable old road." This was, so far as it went, a simple solution of his difficulty. Before long, however, complications occurred, which placed him in a serious dilemma.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

One morning, just outside the gate, they met Lizzie Egan, Colonel Hodson's nurserymaid, wheeling along two fat little twin girls, whose drowsy heads nodded in their big white-frilled bonnets like a couple of fantastic giant blossoms. After a short preliminary gossip, Lizzie said : " Was you hearin' lately how poor Mrs. Reilly is ? "

" Sure, I haven't had e'er a chance since Sunday," said Kate, " and then she was only pretty middlin'."

" 'Deed, then the crathur's to be pitied. And had she heard a word at all from Willie ? "

" At that time she hadn't ; but for aught I know she maybe might agin now."

" Well, he'd a right to be ashamed of himself, anyway. 'Takin' off like that, and lavin' the poor ould woman frettin' in disthraction till she isn't the size of a hedge-sparrow. Jimmy Collins was tellin' us he seen her one day last week, waitin' at the post office, and he said you could ha' just given her another double up, and slipped her in at the slit of the letter-box handy, she was that stooped and wizened away to nothin'. Sure, Willie might aisy throuble himself to send her a line of a letter to say where he's went. That's the laist he might do, let

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

alone not havin' the manners so much as to ax whether the boy he was after murtherin' might be dead or alive."

"Och, for that matter," Kate said, "people say the divil takes care of his own. Sorra the notion Alec Sweeny had of dyin', nor wouldn't if it was off of ten forty-fut ladders he was shook."

"Oof, then, it's little call Mrs. Reilly has to be disthressin' herself about that Willie of hers aither; if that's the way of it, *he's* safe enough," said Lizzie. "I'd ha' called in goin' by to see how she was, only that we aren't very great these times, you know. She heard me mother passin' some remark on his conduc', and bitter as sut she's been agin us ever since. But I thought you were along be her door most days."

"Sure, not at all. What's come over Master Mac there I dunno, but pitchforks wouldn't get him along that road. Nothin'll suit him except streeelin' off up the lanes at the back of the house. If he's axed to turn that corner, you might think you was offerin' to take him into disolit wildernesses. He won't look the way it is," Kate said ruefully.

"He's frightened of Molloy's big dog—him below at the Bridge, that comes out barkin' and

MAC'S ADVENTURES

leppin'—that's it, you may depind. Sure, I do sometimes have the work of the world gettin' Miss Carrie past him," said Lizzie. "Screechin' she'll be like as if you was ringin' a little pig. The baste wouldn't hurt man or mortal, but it's the great coarse bark he has, like a door slammin', or a little clap of thunder, that scares the children when they're small. And it's apt to be what's took the young fellow."

"Very belike it is then," said Kate. "There's no end to the foolishness of them before they've got the wit."

"Or afterwards aither," said Lizzie. "The more sinse they have, the less reasonable they'll behave themselves, accordin' to my experience." And with that they parted.

Mac was positively bewildered with disgust and indignation. He had overheard all this discussion, while apparently helping Gaby to climb up the gate-post, and the scandalous conjecture so coolly made by Lizzie, and adopted by Kate, came to him like a sudden blast of scorching air. Afraid of a barking dog! Placed in the same category with a crying baby! A calumny so outrageous could not be too energetically refuted. But how was this to be done effectually without facing the visible horror of the Frightful Beasts?—an

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

ordeal which he could not contemplate with equanimity. One point alone was clear enough; he must modify his simple plan of merely avowing a dislike for Madden's Lane as a sufficient reason for shunning it. That would now leave him open to disgraceful imputations. Yet it was difficult to devise a better one.

All the rest of the afternoon he pondered the subject inconclusively, and was so much pre-occupied with it at tea-time that his great-grandmother asked him if he was sleepy, thus crowning the insults of the day. He replied politely and reprovably: "If a Person was sleepy, I suppose he'd have the sense to go to bed, no matter *how* early it was—even if the sun was shining straight into his cup of tea—and not think it fine to sit up blinking like an old owl."

"You see, you were so quiet, my dear," his great-grandmother said, half apologetically, feeling herself set down, and misappropriating the old owl.

"It would be a queer thing," said Mac, "if a Person couldn't keep himself awake inside without making a noise outside, like a clock tickin' to show it was goin' on. I rather wouldn't be talkin' all the while as if I was wounded up with a key."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

But next morning Mac made an important announcement on the doorsteps. "Gaby's to choose where we're goin' to-day," he said. "In fact, I think I'll always let him choose. For you see, Kate, it's only a quarter as much our walk as his, because he goes it on four legs, and both of us on only two. So if he chooses, it will be a great deal fairer. We'll just watch which way he'll turn."

Kate, remembering what direction Gaby always seemed disposed to take, was so well satisfied with this arrangement that she felt no wish to cavil at Master Mac's logic or arithmetic; and a sparkle lit up her melancholy grey eyes as she thought to herself how surely she could call this morning at Mrs. Reilly's. It was, however, too hastily kindled, and was extinguished speedily. For when they all three reached the gate, Mac suddenly picked up a pebble, and flung it as far as he could towards Crumloughlin, indeed nearly toppling over head foremost with the vehemence of his throw. And, of course, Gaby needed no bidding to be off in a rapturous whirl upon its track. Whereupon Mac said complacently, "There, you see he wants to go this way," and set forward with the air of one acting from a strong sense of duty.

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

“ Ah, now, Master Mac, weren’t you the contrhary child to go do that ? ” Kate called after him remonstrantly. “ Sure, how was the baste to know his own mind, and you dis-thractin’ him wid peltin’ stones about the road ? ”

But Mac continued to stump along inexorably. “ I promised poor Gaby we’d go wherever he liked,” he said in a highly moral tone, “ so I wouldn’t disappoint him now on any account.” And Kate could only follow him with chagrin, rightly foreboding a meditated repetition of the manœuvre upon all such occasions in future. As for Mac, though he did his best to believe in his own disinterested deference to Gaby’s wishes, he more than half suspected that he was behaving somewhat meanly ; and, despite his virtuous airs, his mood continued to be partly crestfallen and partly defiant, as he trudged along in brown holland suit and broad straw hat, through the hot sunshine, preceded by the cheery terrier, and followed by the reluctant maid.

The success of this stratagem was, moreover, destined to be transient. On the very next morning, when he was looking at a volume of Du Maurier’s society pictures in the hall, he heard his great-grandmother’s

MAC'S ADVENTURES

time-worn treble calling from the breakfast-room door to Kate a-scrub on the steps outside. "Oh, Kate," it said, "I find we are short of eggs. I wonder could you get some anywhere to-day when you are out with Master Mac?" and Kate replied with great alacrity: "Ay, sure, ma'am; there does be mostly a good few at the Widow Reilly's down beyond the Bridge. Grand layin' hens she has in it." And, "You might bring me a dozen, then, please," said Mrs. Kavanagh.

Mac's heart sank as he listened to this dialogue, which seemed to fix inevitably the direction of that morning's walk. He said to himself that Mrs. Reilly's hens were nasty old beasts, and he wished to goodness Gaby had ate them all the last time he was waiting there for Kate to finish, just asking what way she was, which usually took a wonderfully long while. Then they couldn't have been laying any detestful eggs for people to go and fetch. But as the hour for setting out drew near, he became alive to the futility of such aspirations, and at length he desperately determined upon a bold, practical step.

About a quarter before twelve o'clock, while he knew Kate to be still finishing her sweeping down of the back stairs, he beckoned silently to

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

Gaby, who obeyed with his broadest grin, and they went quietly out of the house together. Mac purposed to give his attendant the slip and go his own way, which certainly should not lead to the precincts of the "Frightful Beasts." He was well aware that the proceeding would be most gravely discountenanced by the authorities, but he could not for a moment weigh their disapproval against that row of horrible, high-reaching heads; and he had long regarded the assumption that he required a caretaker at all as one of those vexatious anachronisms, which a Person found himself so frequently called upon to point out. His independent expedition thus would serve a twofold end, asserting a principle as well as averting a miserable hour.

It started prosperously enough. On his way down the avenue Mac successfully eluded notice by slipping behind a laurel when overtaken by the pony-carriage in which his great-grandmother was driving to inquire for Lady Olive Despard's bronchitis. But when he came to the front gate, it happened that a fawn-coloured, sharp-nosed collie was in the act of trotting past, upon observing whom, Gaby, inflated with a sense of being on his own premises, stood in the middle of the gravel

MAC'S ADVENTURES

sweep and made contemptuous remarks. Of these the stranger took no notice whatever, and Gaby misconstruing this forbearance, being himself neither conspicuously prudent nor magnanimous, was ill-advised enough to venture on a short rush towards him, with yaps of insufferable import. The natural consequence was that in another moment he saw the collie dancing at him open-mouthed, whereupon he lost his head, and, instead of fleeing into the more obvious refuge, bolted away down the road, with his enemy's nose grazing his craven heels.

Mac followed in pursuit of both, filled with consternation, which increased as he found how rapidly he was being left behind. Round a corner the two dogs whisked, into a grassy-rutted cart-track, and by the time he had raced through the open field-gate at its end, they were out of sight, and his only clue was a sound of yelping far and farther ahead. Guided thereby, he ran along, skirting the hedgerow with its high-grown fringe of late summer weeds, and clambering over stiles, in and out of another empty hayfield, on the margin of which something scudded away, hopelessly beyond the reach of his shouted commands and menaces. He was so bent upon

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

the rescue of the recreant Gaby, that he never once thought of whither he might be going, or with what creatures he might fall in, considerations which would otherwise have lain uppermost. Next there confronted him a tallish plastered wall, with flat slabs projecting sparsely from it for steps. Up these Mac heaved his inadequate legs in a dislocating manner, and he plumped down on the other side into a rustling bed of nettles.

When he got to his feet again, he perceived that he was in a field-corner, where, on the one hand, wall and hedge meeting at a sharp angle, and on the other a grassy slope swelling up, narrowly circumscribed the view. It was a place in which he had never been before, and his route thence seemed by no means clear to him. But as he stood perplexed, Gaby himself, safe and unmolested, trotted into his ken a little way up the slope. He was panting still, but had recovered sufficiently to sniff about intermittently with a business-like air, as if surmising rabbit-holes. Apparently, however, he had for the time being abandoned himself to evil ways, as when Mac called to him gleefully, he left his master's shouts unheeded, without even pretending not to hear, and after a little desultory jogging to and fro, ran

MAC'S ADVENTURES

quickly off out of sight over the swarded ridge. This line of conduct distressed and annoyed Mac, who, now that he was relieved about the dog, began to reflect uneasily upon his strange surroundings and possible neighbours. What if some frightful beast came ambling down that hill at him, or strode abruptly over the hedge close by? He did not feel by any means sure either that he recollected his way home. In short, if he would have self-confessed it, forsaken Kate's arrival at this juncture would not have been unwelcome. On the whole it seemed to him that he had better start once more in pursuit of Gaby; so he began to scamper up among the clumps of ragweed and thistles, uttering calls as he went, which betrayed more perturbation of spirit than he guessed.

Near the top of the slope his path was crossed by somebody who came out from beneath the boughs of an elm tree, in whose noon-stunted shade he had been sitting. It was a tall, dark-faced young man in a labourer's dust-coloured suit, with a blue bundle and a blackthorn.

"Fine day, sir," he said to Mac. "Would you be lookin' for anybody?"

"For a shaggy little disobedient wretch, that

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

won't ever mind a word one says to him—at least, he sometimes won't ever—I think it's rabbits he's hunting," Mac replied, breathlessly. In his hurry he forgot to touch his hat until the end of his sentence, when he supplied the omission with much correctness.

"Maybe, now, that might be himself over there," the young man said, taking a glance round, and then pointing to a place where Gaby was, in fact, skirmishing, nose to ground.

Mac suddenly climbed up on a fallen log, which brought the truant into his field of vision as well. "So it is, I declare," he said. "I was lookin' the wrong way before."

"He's after the rabbits, sure enough," said the young man; "but he'll soon tire of that. It's only of a very odd while there does be e'er a one down these fields. Belike you come here along wid somebody?" he suggested, surveying Mac, who, reassured by company, had sat down on the log to rest, and presented an appearance rather less portly than might have been expected in a person whose age lacked not more than ten months and one week of six years.

"Oh, no, I'm exercisin' Gaby quite by myself to-day," said Mac. "Kate Heron does

MAC'S ADVENTURES

come with us sometimes, just because it's sociabler, you see."

"Oh, Kate Heron, bedad!" the young man said, and looked round him again.

"She isn't here to-day," said Mac. "I told you only sometimes."

"So you did, sir," said the young man.

"And because it's sociabler," said Mac.

"Ay, sir, to be sure," said the young man, "and is she gettin' her health these times? and her sisters, and her father?"

"I don't know about *them*," said Mac. "But to the best of my b'lief Kate's perfitty well. It's Mrs. MacQuaide, the cook, that thinks she'll drop off her two feet some fine day, she's so killed with standin' over the heat of the blazin' fires."

"And is there any talk, sir, at all—of Kate gettin' married?" the young man asked, swinging his bundle about by the knotted handkerchief ends.

"If you do that with it, it'll untie, and everything come flingin' itself out head foremost," Mac said warningly. "And there may be talk, and a great deal of talk, but people don't go about repeatin' whatever gossip they may happen to hear downstairs."

"Sure, not at all, sir, by no manes," said the

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

young man. "I only axed the question of you because—you see I'm just after trampin' over from the town of Greenore; off in Scotland I've been this last couple of months, and maybe I'll be steppin' on again, and not stoppin' here any time—it just depinds. I've met ne'er a sinsible crathur yet to be tellin' me aught I want to know, and I've as many as ten minds this minyit to turn back the way I come. So I was wonderin' what news there might be in it since I quit, such as buryin's or marryin's, or any talk of the like."

"Oh, of course, news isn't gossip," said Mac. "It's an entirely diff'rent thing. If it's news, I shouldn't mind tellin' you anythin' I heard talk about. But I think there hasn't been much about marryin's or buryin's, at least since I came to stay here. Let me consider"—and Mac considered with his chin in the air, and his over-large hat set very far back on his head. "Oh, I know there *is* great talk about one thing, only it happened before I came, and that's the row there was when they were buildin' Mr. Carden's rick. It was what you may call a row, for one man actually went and knocked another off the top of the ladder, because he got annoyed at somethin', down on the paved stones, and no thanks to him if

MAC'S ADVENTURES

he wasn't killed dead on the spot. 'They're always talkin' about that—Kate and everybody.'"

"Are they, sir, bedad? And what do they be sayin', everybody and Kate?"

"Oh, but Mrs. MacQuaide says nobody need mind a word of Kate Heron's, because she used to be speaking to Willie Reilly—that's the man that got annoyed—and so that's the only reason she sticks up for him now. Not that she's got any great call to be troublin' her head about him, Mrs. MacQuaide says, after his runnin' off the way he did, and never so much as sendin' home tale or tidin's of where he was gone to. Poor Alec Sweeny was worth ten of him, she says—the man who got knocked off; he was always pleasant. And she'd twice as soon be marryin' him, if it was her, as a cross-tempered firebrand like Willie Reilly. It's *news* that I'm repeatin', you know."

"Why, to be sure—not a word of gossip is there in it at all, sir. But what does Kate Heron say?"

"She says that Alec Sweeny had a right to have held his fool's tongue, instead of to be givin' impudence to other people, and then nothin' would have happened anybody."

"And true for her, the Lord knows," the

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

young man vehemently said. "What business had he to be blatherin' about what didn't anyways consarn him, when he was bid keep himself quiet? Supposin' a man did be chance put the collar on wrongways up, and he harnessin' in the divil's own hurry, it's no more than might aisy ha' happint himself, or any other person, that he need take upon himself to be bawlin' it up to young Maggie Heron, where she was treadin' the rick, and ready to run home wid the story to Kate and the rest of them the next thing she done, as he well knew, so he did; he done it a-purpose, and the divil's cure to him," Mac's new acquaintance asseverated, again swinging his bundle recklessly round.

At this unexpected heat Mac felt slightly taken aback, though he observed without discomposure: "If I was you, I'd put it down out of my hand altogether, if I couldn't keep from flourishin' it about. But besides that, the woman where Kate goes to get hairpins says that Alec Sweeny was only jokin', the way he had, and no reasonable person would have thought bad of it. And Tim Brennan says in his opinion it's likely enough they both had drink taken, and neither the two of them, nor the one of them, rightly knew what they were

· MAC'S ADVENTURES

doing. And Dick the postman's sister says she always had a sort of liking for poor Willie Reilly, but there was no denyin' he had an ugly passionate temper, and you couldn't know what minute he might be flarin' up in a fury, any more than you could tell by lookin' at it when a steam-engine would be lettin' a screech out of it. And old Mrs. Walsh said she'd be long sorry to see a daughter's child of hers married to the likes of him, that might up and hit her a crack some fine day she'd never get the better of. I think old Mrs. Walsh is Kate Heron's grandmother."

"She is, sir, she is ; and, begorrah, she only said very right," said the young man.

"Well, but afterwards, when we were going home, Kate was saying to a girl we met on the road that she'd dare say all the while Alec Sweeny slipped his foot by accident, and the lock of hay fallin' on him had nothin' to say to it at all ; and Willie Reilly never intended him any harm ; and if the truth was known, he *didn't* make a wipe at him with his pitchfork."

"I'd give more than a little," said the young man, "to think that was the way of it. But I know bettther."

"It was an immense high rick, I b'lieve," said Mac. "Joe Malone said anybody tumblin'

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

off the top of it would be apt to be broke to jomethry—jomethry means somethin' like a dissected map."

"It was so ; and be the same token, there it is glimpsin' through the trees forenint us," said the young man, pointing across a breadth of pasture land to where a yellow gable-end gleamed through an opening in a cloud of round-crested elms.

"By Jove ! and is that the real one he fell off ?" said Mac, gazing with much interest and a little awe. "And were you there too ?"

"Part of the while I was, sir," said the other gloomily. As he stood staring at the distant rick, his memory brought him back to the noon of a hotter day, not very long past, when he had been at close quarters with it, pitching hay, in fact, on the top. He recalled the glowing glare of the June sunshine, that seemed to clutch at anybody who stepped into it out-of-doors, and to hold him faster and tighter the longer he stayed under it ; and the strong scent of the clovery hay that came wobbling up to him in heavy bundles on the end of Alec Sweeny's fork. And then he recollected how, just when everything was at its most scorching point, he had heard Alec beginning with a shrill cackle of laughter to relate the story of the ridiculous

MAC'S ADVENTURES

blunder committed by Willie Reilly that morning while hastily harnessing the cross jennet, and how he himself, finding peremptory injunctions to desist of no avail, and stung by the titters of Maggie Heron, had resorted to the more vigorously repressive measure of hurling down upon his too communicative colleague a blinding and smothering forkful. A spasm of rage made his thrust of fierce-looking steel prongs so much more than merely reckless, that Alec had probably been lucky to drop out of his reach, tumbling sheer off the tall ladder thud upon the stones, amid the shrieks and shouts of all beholders. "Och, murther!—Och, mercy on us all!—Och, Holy Virgin!—The man's kilt—he's disthroyed!" But there the scene shifted, for a guilty consciousness of that furious moment had prompted the assailant to flee, scrambling down on the other side of the rick, without waiting to know whether a result so fatal had actually supervened. Before continuing his flight overseas, he did contrive to learn that Alec Sweeny's fall had not killed him outright anyway; but during his two months' absence at the Scotch harvesting he had had no home news. Now, being just returned to Clonmanavon, whether he would there remain or again decamp must

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

depend upon what turn several things had taken ; and he wondered how far he might trust the report given by this queer, old-fashioned, talkative, little imp of a child, who was evidently the belonging of some Quality staying up at old Mrs. Kavanagh's, and under the charge of Kate Heron. Meanwhile Mac had resumed :

“ Well, then, you know, everybody declared every mortal bone in his body was broken. But were you there when Dr. Crampton came and said the most that ailed him was that he'd wranched his ankle round ? So he wranched it right for him again, and Mrs. MacQuaide thinks that if Alec would have taken advice he might be well mended by this time ; but he must needs go off with his foot to old Christy Hughes, the cow-doctor, and get him tinkerin' at it. And in my opinion he was a very great fool to do any such thing. For it's no business of Christy Hughes to understand about the legs of human persons ; they're no more like cows' legs than the legs of chairs and tables. By the way,” said Mac, sidling along the log nearer to where the young man stood, “ about how high was the highest cow or horse that you ever saw anywhere—near here, for instance ? ”

“ Sure, the same as e'er a one you'd see in it,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

sir, yourself, I should suppose," said the young man. "But you was tellin' me the news about Alec Sweeny's fut?"

"He's got very little use of it yet, poor man!—very little at all," Mac replied, shaking his head so solemnly that his hat fell off backwards. "If you meet him on the road, he's stumpin' with two sticks as slow as a snail. It isn't like anybody really walkin'; you'd think it was somethin' standin' there, and nearly tumblin' over every minute. Christy Hughes made a fine botch of it, whatever he did to him. They say it's a wonder if he's ever fit for anythin' again, and Dr. Crampton says his only chance is not to put his foot to the ground for the next couple of months. Only Tim Brennan says it's easy talkin', but how's a man to get his livin' without wages for that length of time? So Alec makes a shift to go as far as the place where they're breakin' stones; that's all he's able for now. It would be pretty detestful to get one's living by breakin' stones on the road, with a black thing on to keep the splinters out of one's eyes. Alec always takes his off when he sees us passin', but it looks ridic'lous."

"I'm as sorry of that as anythin'," said the young man, "as sorry as anythin', supposin' that made a hair of differ. It's cruel, now,

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

what'll take and happen in a moment of time, and nobody intendin' any great harm maybe, if you come to consider, but, och ! sure the Lord knows where you'll ha' got to afore you've e'er a chance of doin' that—somewheres you never thought of bein' very belike. . . . And so you do be meetin' Alec Sweeny on the road now and again, sir ? And has he and Kate Heron anythin' to say to one another these times at all ? ”

“ I can't be repeatin' every single thing. People sayin' ‘ What way are you ? ’ and ‘ It's a fine day,’ when they're passin', isn't news,” Mac said with some sternness.

“ 'Deed, no, sir,” assented the young man.

“ Really, I don't think I remember anything else,” said Mac reflectively. “ They talk sometimes about Willie Reilly the annoyed man's mother ; and Rose, the other housemaid, says what she thinks baddest of, is his leavin' the poor old woman there all this while, frettin' herself sick, and never writin' her a line to say what's become of him.”

“ And did you say she was took bad ? ” said the young man. “ It's running over I'll be across the fields ; that's the shortest way.”

“ Oh, she got news yesterday from her daughter away in Chicago, who's doin' grandly,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

and sent her an order of money, and that's heartened her up finely, Rose says. But it's no thanks to that Willie Reilly. In fact, nothin's any thanks to him, I believe, and if he stayed out of this altogether," Mac said, in the tone of one making a familiar quotation, "it 'ud be no great harm."

"I'd ha' wrote fast enough, and so I would," said the young man; "only I thought she'd be writin' back, and the truth is I was in dread of what she might be tellin' me news of—somebody after dyin', or gettin' married, that 'ud be worser to my mind. Troth, if I'm not as good-for-nothin' as I can stick together, get me one that is."

At this moment a shrill alarm of barking and yelping arose from Gaby, and he was seen to be digging violently close under the wall at a little distance.

"He's got one," Mac exclaimed; and ran off, followed by the young man, passing on the way several perfectly normal head of cattle, which were peacefully sauntering and grazing. The field wall was here rather low all along, and in just one place the soil about the roots of a willow tree which grew against it banked it up to such a height that, standing there, a person as tall as Mac could easily look over it. By the

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

time they arrived, Gaby had disappointingly abandoned his excavations and roved farther on, leaving Mac nothing more interesting to do than ascend this small mound, and see what might be on the other side of the wall. What there was gave him a shock of surprise, for instead of merely looking across into another field, he found himself staring down into a road, which lay ever so far beneath. It was a narrow road, with a sharp bend in it a short way to his left, and a long, straight stretch on the right ; and he felt vaguely aware of some familiar thing in its aspect. By and by he identified that feature as a dark stone cross standing in a recess of the bank just opposite. Very old and ancient it was, a block which the wild weather of many a century had rough-hewn again into almost its primitive shapelessness. Mac remembered it quite well, and the three rude granite steps upon which it was mounted, with a sloe-bush sprouting from a crack in one of them ; the recollection was somehow disagreeable to him, yet when or where he had seen it he could not immediately think.

As he was puzzling over this point, a figure came into sight at the farthest end of the road, slowly approaching.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

“Oh, here’s Alec Sweeny himself,” said Mac; “and he’s walking lamerer than ever.”

The young man, who was leaning against the willow-trunk behind him, stooped forward to watch, and began muttering half aloud : “ Ay, bejabers, lame he is. It’s the bad offer he’s makin’ at gettin’ along at all, and he that ought to be keepin’ himself quiet, if he’s to give himself e’er a chance. Goodness forgive me, I’m thinkin’ I have the man bravely disthroyed. But I’ll halve me six pound ten wid him, I will so ; or if me mother doesn’t want it, he might take the whole of it and welcome, then he could lie up for the winther, and he might git a sound fut under him agin the spring. Faix, now, it’s a quare dale aisier crookenin’ things than straightenin’ thim again. And sure a man’s to be pitied when he’s so be his nathur that he’ll flare up in a blaze inside him all of a suddint minyit, till he’s no more notion what he’s after doin’ than the flames of fire has of what they’re after burnin’. Many’s the time I do be thinkin’, and I takin’ a scythe or a rapin’-hook in me hand, the divil himself only knows what desthruccion I mayn’t ha’ done on some mislucky body afore I quit a hold of it. But Alec Sweeny had no business to be raisin’ the laugh on me, if he *was* thinkin’ of Kate

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

Heron, and be hanged to him. If I thought she was thinkin' of him, it's his neck I'd as lief be breakin' as his ould ankle. And as I was sayin', sooner than get news they were marryin', I'd hear tell he was in his grave, and his murder's sin on me sowl—I would so. That there is at the bottom of me heart I well know all the while, if I cocked twenty diff'rint lies atop of it, and the Ould Lad's got good raison to be proud of me and the likes of me. Och, wirra, but the man looks powerful poor and weakly in himself. Halvin' them pounds'll be the laist I can do, and little enough. They'd ha' set Kate and me up grand in our housekeepin' next Shrove, but sorra the bit of me'll ax her now till the year after, and afore then she's very apt to ha' took up wid somebody else; and a good job for her—and maybe it's a good job too for every bone in his body that I dunno who he is. Sorra a word I'll ax her."

The young man fell silent, and shrank back a little farther under the boughs as Alec Sweeny came by. He was a tall, large-framed young man, too, but looked gaunt and pinched; his coat, greenishly discoloured, hung baggily from sharp angles, and his limp was so dolorous that the beholders felt relief when it stopped, and he sat down on the steps of the old cross, staring

MAC'S ADVENTURES

drearily into the dust at his feet. Almost at the same moment, round the nearer corner, came Kate Heron, in her homely brown shawl, and the incongruous bedizened hat due to her position in the service of Quality. She was walking rather hurriedly, and carrying an empty basket errand-wise; but at the cross she hesitated, and then halted, saying: "It's a fine mornin', Alec."

"Whethen, now, what need is there for her to be stoppin'?" murmured a malcontent voice from above. "A good-day goin' by 'ud ha' been plinty."

Kate's greeting, indeed, apparently gave satisfaction nowhere, for Alec Sweeny seemed just to grunt in acknowledgment, without raising his eyes.

"And I hope you're gettin' your health somethin' better now, Alec," Kate added, after a slight pause.

At this Alec Sweeny not only looked up, but scrambled abruptly with painful haste to his feet. "See you here, Kate Heron," he said. "Do you take me for a born fool? Or do you think I don't know as well as I know me own name the only raison you'd spake a civil word to me is considherin' I'm an ould show of a cripple, that it's charity for a dacint body to

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

be passin' the time of day to ? Sorra another raison have you. Sure you wouldn't be lookin' the side of the road I was on. And let me tell you, I'd liefer be listenin' to me ould hammer crackin' the stones. So you may just keep your fine talk for any that 'ud care to be pickin' it up out of the dirt, as if it was ha'pence you were throwin' a blind beggar. Sorra the other raison." And he hobbled away with reckless lurches, still muttering.

"Set up himself, then, bedad, and what other raison had he the impidence to be expectin' ?" commented an overhearer. "Och, but he's the misfort'nit-lookin' bosthoon. And if that's the way he'll be biddin' me keep me ould pounds to meself, what am I to do at all to set things straight and contint me own mind ?"

Kate Heron had lingered, looking after the lame man, as if pondering upon this rebuff, but had just turned to go her way, when Gaby, who was now running to and fro along the wall-top, barked fiercely at a robin, which caused her to look up and recognise a well-known, broad-brimmed straw hat. "Guide me to goodness, Master Mac, and is it up there you are ? And me lookin' for you every place, and thinkin' then the mistress must ha' picked you up

MAC'S ADVENTURES

in the avenue, and took you drivin' wid her."

"You might have *knowed* I was goin' to-day on my walk with myself," Mac replied with dignity, chiefly for the benefit of his new acquaintance in the background.

"And what at all brought you up there? Ah, now, Master Mac, you're the ungovernable child. Don't be lanin' over the edge of the ugly high wall, there's a darlint. How'll I get you down out of that ever? For it's breaking your neck you'll be, if I take me eye off you to run round to the gate."

"He's right enough, Kate; you needn't be disthressin' yourself," said the young man, stepping forward.

"Saints above—it's not Willie Reilly?" Kate said, doubly startled; "sure nobody'd ha' thought of seein' you, and we all expectin' you home every day of the week for this long while. And where at all have you been that you weren't writin'?"

"If you'd run round to the gate below, *machree*—no, I mane just plain Kate Heron—I'd be fetchin' the little gintleman along to meet you, and it 'ud be handier tellin'," the young man suggested, and Kate acted accordingly.

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

“ I dare say that *would* be the best way of goin’ home,” said Mac. “ It must be rather near lunch-time. Gaby, where’ve you got to ? ” He looked around him for the dog ; and as he did so he made a remarkable discovery. Close by, a little knot of beasts were standing with their heads over the wall ; the two or three cows and a sorrel pony, whose face with its white streak somehow seemed unpleasantly familiar to him. Where had he seen it before ? Why, looking over a wall just like this one. But was not that the wall of the Field of the Frightful Beasts ? Could it be possible that he was actually inside it ? “ And I declare to goodness,” Mac said to himself, “ we used to be passin’ that stone with the steps—and there’s the old white horse lookin’ over too. They *aren’t* Frightful ; they’re only standin’ on the high bank. But how was a Person to know that a wall would be pretendin’ it was the height of a house along the road, and then turn into a little quite lowish one on the wrong side ? ”

This view of the matter was such a new and agreeable light to him, that he naturally wished to flash it on ; so he began : “ Do you see that little black cow there ? ”

But his companion, who was thinking of

MAC'S ADVENTURES

different things, misconceived the motive of the question, and replied : " Sure, you needn't mind her, sir, she wouldn't hurt anybody. It's only the flies tormentin' her makes her put down her head that-a way." An answer which led Mac to keep half the width of the field between himself and insulting insinuations as he proceeded towards the gate.

There Kate Heron awaited them, and one of the first remarks that Willie Reilly made to her was :

" I'm not axin' you, Kate ; troth, nor won't I this great while. But d'you think, now, you'd think entirely too bad of waitin' for me as long as to a year from next Shrove ? Till I get meself a trifle broke of me outrageous temper, and till I gather another odd few pounds instid of them here that I'm intindin' for Alec Sweeny ; and till I've kep' the pledge for a while, for truth it is I've no call to be stirrin' meself up wid dhrinks, that's deminted enough whether or no ; and till I've some sort of sartinty in me that I'm not widin the turn of your hand every instant whatever of be-havin' no betther than a ragin' hyenna. I'm not axin' you, mind you. But if I had a notion you wouldn't ha' took up wid anybody else agin then——"

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

“Saints and patience, Willie!” Kate said, as airily as she could, “that’s a terrible great hape of things you’re to be gettin’ done between this and then. You’d be hard put to it, I should say, in a dozen twelvemonths, let alone one.”

“I’d contrive it, if that was all,” he said. “But it’s too long a len’t’h of time to be expectin’ of you altogether. Somebody else’ll be axin’ you; and then if I keep out of the raich of doin’ murdher on some one, that’ll be the most I’ll manage. Ay, but it’s too long entirely.”

“For the matter of that I’d wait a year and welcome, or ten year, or twenty, I’d wait *contint*,” Kate said, with an earnestness upon which her hearer might have put a somewhat discouraging construction. But he did not, and rejoined:

“Glory be to goodness! then we’ll do grand after all. It’s steppin’ along I’ll be now to see me mother, and after that I’ll go straightways and make all square wid poor Alec Sweeny. Sure a rest for his fut’s all he’s wantin’; dancin’ jig polthogue he’ll be at our weddin’ one of these fine days.”

He had set off, but after a few quick steps faced round to add, in a tone slightly con-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

science-pricked, "Mind you, Kate, I'm not axin' you, nor goin' to." Then he started again at a brisk trot, which became a positive gallop as he descended the grassy slope.

"He might have the sense to know that tearin' along like that's the very way to make them run at him, if that's what he's afraid of," Mac, watching his departure, observed with supercilious vindictiveness; "and one would suppose anybody could easily see that they're not Frightful Beasts at all."

That evening Mac and his great-grandmother had cold chicken at tea, instead of eggs; for the morning's adventure had put them so completely out of Kate's mind, that she aimlessly brought home her basket, "as empty," Mrs. MacQuaide averred wrathfully upon discovering the omission, "as your own *stook-awn's* head is of wit. And what am I to be poachin' now for the misthress to-night?" It was a brilliant sunset hour, and the long rays again slanted straight into Mac's creamy cup; but this time it was the old lady who seemed rather dull and abstracted. She had heard on her drive that morning how her old friend Lady Olive's chronic bronchitis had

FIELD OF THE FRIGHTFUL BEASTS

been suddenly cured, and her thoughts kept running on the news.

"We can't have been much older than you, my dear, quite small, small children, the first summer her people came to Lisanards, and that would be about the year '26. It's a long time now since she's been well enough to see any one, but it gave a sort of object to one's drive to go and ask if she had had a good night. Well, there could be no other end to that."

"You must come down to the fields with me instead, great little grandmamma," said Mac.

"Oh, my dear, my days for running about in the fields were over long ago."

"I *don't* run about," said Mac; "not unless somethin' partic'lar happens. I was in a very nice one to-day, where there is a pond, and part of an old car, and a black little donkey that won't let you go very near it. You'd like it when you got inside. There's a plank across a ditch, and steps up a wall, quite easy."

"Stiles and ditches, my dear child," said his great-grandmother. "Do you want me to break all my old bones?"

"That sounds very much like just a 'scuse," Mac said, with some severity. "There's only two stiles, and you needn't tumble down into

MAC'S ADVENTURES

the nettles unless you put your foot on the wrong stone. And as for the Frightful Beasts, if that's what you're thinkin' of, I really can *not* imagine who put it into your head that there were any such things."

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

The Aunt of the Savages

MAC BARRY and his cousin Aylmer O'Sullivan had spent a rather dreary week at Sheenagh House, to which they had been suddenly driven over from Glenamber, away beyond the other end of the lough, because in the household there a case of measles had occurred very inopportunately, just before the great occasion of their cousin Norah's wedding. The two little boys did not like their change of quarters, for at Sheenagh House they found nobody but two elderly servants and Uncle Stephen, an old bachelor, who did not care for children, and did care for having things tidy. Mrs. Connell, the cook, and Lizzie, the parlourmaid, thought it their duty to be constantly "keeping an eye on the young gentlemen," and to the young gentlemen this seemed an inconvenient and evil eye, which discovered mischief in the most harmless occupations. So they sometimes thought the hours too long in those showery July days. Then, one morning, Uncle Stephen,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

on his way to breakfast, came upon them where they were making a plantation, with seedling sycamores grubbed up in the shrubbery, just at the bottom of the hall-door steps. It was not, perhaps, a very suitable situation, and they certainly had scattered about a great deal of black earth, keeping a liberal supply for their own hands and faces. Uncle Stephen seemed annoyed when he stopped to tell them that they must not make such a mess ; and as he was going in he added : " I believe your aunt Amy is coming to see you this afternoon, so I hope by that time you will look more like civilised beings and less like young savages."

Thereupon Mac and Aylmer, who had already breakfasted, went and talked grumbly under the big sycamore close by.

" I wonder where this old aunt is coming from *boovring* ? " said Mac. " There weren't any at Glenamber."

" I don't like aunts," said Aylmer. " Mine is always asking me seven times three times, and the dates of kings and things that are no affair of hers."

" Mine are great-aunts," said Mac ; " and they talk and talk as if a Person was always wanting to hear about kittens and tame tomtits."

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

"We might stay away outside till she's gone," suggested Aylmer.

"Let's go and live like wild savages, and never come back here any more, for one can't be let do a single thing," said Mac, with resentful reference to their interrupted plantation.

"Savages is black," Aylmer objected.

"Well," said Mac, "I dare say we might *grow* black, if people let us alone." He looked hopefully at his grimy hands.

"What do savages live wild on?" Aylmer wondered.

"Oh, hunting and fishing. We could fish plenty," said Mac, "in the lake over there, that we saw the time Lizzie came screeching after us to say we'd be drowned in the bog-holes. And I've three matches in my pocket, that strike on anything, to cook them with."

"And there's a beautiful old fishing-rod in a corner in the back hall. It only wants a bit of string, and that," said Aylmer, "I can get off a parcel of oatmeal I saw in the pantry."

"Then we'll get it now," said Mac, "for Mrs. Connell's feeding the hens, and Lizzie's always making herself another cup of tea in the kitchen until she has to go up and do the rooms. Nobody won't see us."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Nobody did see them as they secured the fishing-rod, and stole out into the shrubberies—nobody but old Moriarty, who was raking at the end of the laurel-walk, and they did not mind passing him, because they knew him to be black out with Mrs. Connell and Lizzie, so that he certainly would not mention it.

“When we’re savages,” Mac said, as they walked along, “we mustn’t ever speak to anybody, but only make signs.”

“What’s signs?” said Aylmer. “I don’t know how to make them; and I’d rather fish.”

“It’s as easy as anything. You just wave your hands about a little, and crook your fingers, and waggle your head,” Mac said, doing so to show how, “and those is signs.”

“But what do savages make them for?” said Aylmer.

“Why, of course,” said Mac, “so that people mayn’t understand what they mean. Savages is uncommonly cunning.”

“Oh, I see,” Aylmer said. But when they had gone a few steps further he added: “If I wanted people not to know what I meant, I just wouldn’t say anything at all.” Aylmer, who was fat and rather lazy, often considered about ways of saving trouble.

It was not far to the lough, along a path

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

smooth under thick evergreens, and rougher presently under hazel and hawthorn bushes, and then soft and springy where it crossed the corner of a bog. Here Mac and Aylmer luckily did not stray into any of the treacherous places where black-looking holes lurked among mossy patches sprinkled with dim white blossoms. They followed the faint track until it brought them to the brow of a grassy slope leading down to the lough. One end of the long, narrow lake curved round there and met a wide band of greensward. Rainy weather had filled it fuller than usual, so that the clear water came brimming up over the gravelly rim which generally bounded it with a sharp gleam, and it lay amongst the fine short grass-blades in silvery-edged streaks, as if it had been spilt on a carpet. If you looked down into it, you could see drowned daisies and speedwell at the bottom, strangely mixed with the drifting blue and snow of the sky. A lane, overhung by steep woods, skirted the opposite shore, but nothing was moving on it. The little boys thought they had come to a delightful place, especially when Mac remembered that savages never wore shoes and stockings, and they put theirs on the flat top of a boulder. It was very luxurious wading, with the soft grass under-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

foot, and the sun-warmed ripples lapping about their ankles, and nobody to be shocked, no matter how much they splashed each other. They had made their way along the margin nearly round to the lane before either of them had had enough of the amusement. Then Aylmer, who was carrying the fishing-rod, trod on a pebble, which hurt his foot slightly, and made him think that it would be pleasant to stop for a while. So he said : " Do you see how it's all ruffled up in there between those two sticking-out rocks ? It must be crammed *full* of trouts. I'll begin fishing."

" That's only the wind in the water," said Mac. " Fishes make round circles, and hop up out of the middle of them like big shiny frogs. I don't believe there's any in that place ; but you can have the first turn of fishing at them."

Aylmer sat down on a grey boulder, which looked as if it had been badly cracked long ago, and stuck together with strips of the greenest velvet, and he began to fish steadily. His hook was a tin-tack, and his fly a buttercup. " They might think it was a yellow, very fat wasp," he said. Mac was for a while quite content to go on with his wading ; he went in deliciously deep, and once, falling down, partly by acci-

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

dent, got thoroughly wet, which was most enjoyable ; and he hopped on one leg to and fro between several islanded tufts of bracken and chumps of furze. But when both his ankles began to ache, he thought he would like a change, and standing beside Aylmer, he said affably : " Now you're tired holding it, I'll take it for a bit, and you can be playing about."

Aylmer, however, only wagged his head slowly sideways, and waved one of his hands in the air.

" You great gaby," Mac said ; " we're not going to be savages except to other people, and you know you were talking like anything just this minute."

Aylmer nodded three times, and kept a firm hold on the fishing-rod.

" Look here," said Mac, " you might be finding sticks to light the fire with when we want to cook them."

Still Aylmer said nothing, but flourished his hand in a way which evidently meant " Find them yourself." He looked fat and aggravating, and as if he did not intend to stir. So Mac said, " Give it to me, will you ? and get out of that," and made a clutch at the rod.

" You beast ! " said Aylmer. " I'd just got

MAC'S ADVENTURES

a beautiful bite, and you've went and shook it off."

"I wouldn't mind if I'd shook off your stupid head," Mac said. Whereupon they scuffled so violently that Aylmer's hat, which was a large straw one, fell into the water, and began to float quickly away. This accident shocked them so much that they stood still immediately, for to a small boy the loss of his head-covering seems as serious as the destruction of a roof. Aylmer lay face downwards on the flat boulder, and made a grasp at the hat as it went bobbing by, but all he did was to soak one of his jacket-sleeves right up to the shoulder. "There now," he said, turning up a countenance full of wrath, "it's swum away to drown itself, and here am I in the blazing sun, enough to kill me."

"I don't believe savages ever do wear hats," Mac said, putting a bold face on the matter, "and I won't anyway." He flung down his straw hat so roughly that the brim cracked nearly off the crown, and a tuft of water forget-me-not stuck up through the chink.

"And dripping wet I am, too," Aylmer went on, "getting my death most likely."

"He'd be welcome to a loan of the ould sack," a voice said startlingly close behind

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

them, and there stood two little girls, who had come quietly over the grass on bare feet, though they had not been wading. One of them held in her hand a long rope with a small white goat grazing at the end of it, and the other was carrying a couple of brownish sacks and a reaping-hook. They wore short, ragged skirts, and over their heads rough, grey shawls, under the shadow of which their narrow faces looked all eyes. The biggest of them was perhaps as much as nine years old, so that to Mac and Aylmer she seemed an experienced person.

"If he had it over the head of him," she said to Mac, "he could take the little wet coateen off of him, and let it get a chance to dry in the sun. There's a very handy hole in the end of this one," she said, unrolling the empty sacks, "and there's plenty of time yet to be fillin' them wid the grass. Rosy M'Clonissy owns it, but she'll loan it and welcome, wouldn't you, Rosy? Say: 'Ay, bedad.'"

"Ay, bedad," Rosy said in a hoarse, shy whisper.

Aylmer, who found his drenched sleeve uncomfortable, and the unshaded sun dazzling, thought he would try this plan, and taking off

MAC'S ADVENTURES

his jacket, wisped himself up in the sack. Mac considered the costume so appropriate that he put on the other one ; and then they did both look as uncivilised as anybody could wish, with bare legs and arms and dirty faces emerging from the rough, earth-coloured folds. The elder little girl, whose name was Matty Shanahan, spread out the blue and white jackets to dry on the flat-topped boulder.

"*Bouver*," Mac said, feeling in his pocket. "I declare my three matches has got quite wet, too. I suppose now all the fire's washed out of them, and how are we to cook the troutses, if we get some bites that sticks on ? "

"If it's a fire," Matty said, "we do be sometimes gettin' the loan of a light off a man goin' by wid a pipe. But there's no sticks, unless you look up yonder under the trees. And I never heard tell of any troutses catchin' in it at all."

"What'll we be cooking, then ? " said Aylmer, who was only half reconciled to the loss of his hat, and disposed to make difficulties.

"Oh — potatoes," Mac said cheerfully, though he did not really think this a satisfactory substitute. "Do you happen to know if there are many about here ? "

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

“ Sorra a pitaty we’ve in it this long while now,” said Matty ; “ sure, we had the last of them ate before Easter.”

“ Then why on earth don’t you get some more ? ” said Mac.

“ How at all,” said Matty, “ when the rest of them wasn’t fit to throw to the hins ? And ne’er a one saved for seed, because where’d be the sinse, me father was sayin’, of puttin’ them down, wid the whole of us starvin’ fast while they would be growin’ slow ? But frettin’ he is now every day, since he was took sick, sittin’ on the wall, to see the bit of land lyin’ empty under the weeds as yella as gold—frettin’ bad he is.”

“ Well, but one must be cooking something ; and it’s getting pretty late,” Aylmer remarked sternly.

“ Sure, it isn’t hardly hungry-time yit, glory be to goodness ! ” said Matty. “ And I was telling you me mother’s had no cowl’d pitaties to be givin’ us to take along wid us, and we grazin’ the little goat, or else yous ’ud be welcome to a bit. When we had them, we did be warmin’ them up grand wid a fire lightin’ in there under the trees. Only yous had a right to not be burnin’ your fingers grabbin’ at them, the way Rosy done, instead of rowlin’ them out wid a stick.”

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"You don't explain properly ; people must have enough to eat, whether there are cold potatoes or not," said Mac politely but decidedly.

Matty stared at him blankly. "You are a quare one," she said. "Has any people ever enough to eat ?"

"Well, if they want to go on for ever and ever and ever, they must be great *pigs*," Mac said, with severity.

"When I've got joggolates," Aylmer said reflectively, "I always *do* want to go on for ever and ever and all the evers that ever were."

Matty continued to look puzzled. "Now and again," she said, after a pause, "we lights a fire, and sticks a few biggish-sized round stones in it by way of pitaties roastin'. But that's only lettin' on, and most whiles we go to the wishin' well above there in the wood for our bit of dinner."

"I didn't know there was anything except water in wells," said Aylmer.

"She said a *wishing* one, didn't you hear ?" Mac said, intending to convey an entirely false impression that this made the matter quite clear to him.

"Saint Brigid owns it," said Matty. "Grand she is. I seen her picture below at Father

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

Christy's, in an illigant white gown streelin' after her, and a sort of gould sunbonnet blowin' out flat off the back of her head. And they say that if you drop a little bit of anythin' into the wather to remind her, she'll send you whativer you're wishin' for. So Rosy and I do be wishin' a bit of dinner off of her."

"And what does she send you?" Mac inquired, with interest.

Aylmer murmured hopefully: "Joggolates, maybe."

"Nothin'," Matty replied disappointingly. "But you never can tell she mightn't take the notion to some day. Rosy and I'll be slippin' up presently."

"We'll come along," said Mac.

"'Deed yous might better," said Matty, "than to be drownin' of yourselves fightin' on the edge of the deep pool. The bits of coateens can be dryin' here till we come back. I'll tether the little goat the way she won't get swallyin' them."

The footpath to the well wound up with a cool shade of green leaves above and, below, a soft paving of dead ones, crossed here and there by roots, which made irregular steps in it. Mac accounted for his tripping over them by saying that they were a different pattern

MAC'S ADVENTURES

from the stairs in most places. However, all the children scrambled safely up to St. Brigid's well, niched in its rounded rock basin under the high, steep bank. Moss, which seemed a still golden-green light among the flickering shadows, muffled its brim, and from the creviced stones behind it harebells trembled and hartstongue drooped. Large shining drops swelled at the points of the long leaves, and splashed down slowly one by one as if a string of beads were broken into the clear water, which they kept astir with a sliding circling ripple. The little girls crossed themselves, and began to say some queer-sounding words, which were Latin, Matty explained to Mac; but she could not answer him satisfactorily when he wanted to know further, what they meant?—a question which might have puzzled the most scholarly—whether savages spoke Latin? and whether Saint Brigid was a savage?

“I don't see how I'm to order dinner that way,” he said, “because I happen not to remember the Latin for anything to eat.”

“Sure, how could she help knowin' right enough what pitaties is?” Matty said.

“And a sup of buttermilk,” Rosy whispered at her elbow.

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

“Is that all you’re going to order?” said Mac. “Why, that’s only a little bit of a dinner—there’s lots of other things.”

“Joggolates!” suggested a familiar, husky voice beside him.

“I will *not* order chocolates,” said Mac; “I know very well that she’d say it wasn’t wholesome enough for people’s dinners.”

“I’d liefer have pitaties than stirabout,” said Matty. “The yella male’s a quare, ugly brash, and there doesn’t be more than a little dab of it for everybody when it’s boiled. Me mother mostly has only the pot scrapin’s, but she says it’s plenty. Pitaties is the best.”

“Roast chicken,” said Mac, “and mashed potatoes, and cold apple pie and custard might do. What shall I drop in?”

“Thim little thimbles off of the fir-tree is handy, if you haven’t e’er a pin or a button,” Matty said. And several small cones were found without difficulty.

Aylmer dropped one in unobserved, and as he did so murmured: “Joggolates!”

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For nearly an hour after the children had gone into the wood, nobody came next or nigh the lough. Then over the brow of the steep,

MAC'S ADVENTURES

grassy slope, and down the same path that Mac and Aylmer had taken, came a figure all in soft white, just tinted with a delicate lilac, as are some crocus cups. Softly white, too, and plumed with faintly tinted feathers, was the large hat which shaded her golden-brown hair. So that she made a very high light in the strong sunshine as she passed through it. She was carrying a small hamper. Anybody who had met her might have noticed that the lowest flounce of her pretty dress was a little bedraggled along its lacy edge, and that her pretty face looked a little unhappy and perplexed. The facts were that she had driven over from Glenamber to bring a share of some wedding festivities to the exiles at Sheenagh House, where, arriving, she had found it deserted, for its master was out, and the servants had slipped down to M'Queen's place, at the cross-roads, in hopes of a glimpse when the bridal carriage drove by honeymoon-wards. Only old Moriarty was by this time scraping in front of the house, and told her how he had seen the young gentlemen a while ago in the shrubbery yonder, on their way to the lough, he'd be bound, as they were carrying the master's old fishing-rod. "And you'll be apt to meet them comin' back by now, miss," he added, "unless

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

they're after drownin' theirselves—that's no ways too unlikely."

"Is it far?" she asked.

"Sure, not at all," he said. "You might sling an ould cabbage-stump into it from the end of the bit of a grove." And on the strength of this she had started. But she was not used to bogs, and consequently had the imprudence to step on a jewel-green, mossy patch, with results harmful to her dainty bridesmaid's attire and little silver-buckled shoes. This accident caused her some vexation, but she forgot all about it when she reached the lough, for as she ran down the grass slope, the first thing she noticed was a straw hat floating on the water, and a few steps further brought her where she found two pairs of long stockings and two pairs of small boots lying on the top of a flat stone. No living creature was in sight except a white goat tethered and grazing; and the thought flashed into her mind that the wearers of these things must have been the little boys she had come to look for; a conjecture which made old Moriarty's seem dreadfully probable. In a great fright she ran along the edge of the water, calling "Mac—Aylmer"; and presently she was still more alarmed by a gleam of something blue and

MAC'S ADVENTURES

white a little way from the shore. It was Aylmer's jacket, which Matty had so carefully spread to dry, and which a breeze had whisked regardlessly into the water. But to Amy Barry it seemed likely to be something so terrible that she was afraid to look at it, and dropping her hamper on the grass, she fled panic-stricken down the lane in search of help.

Very soon after she had gone the four children descended the shadowy path between the tree-trunks, and stepped out again upon the sunny, green margin—four as wild small figures, in their ragged wrappings, as you could have met in the width of Connaught. The little boys had wanted to linger up at the well, imagining their wishes more likely to be fulfilled upon the spot, but Matty, speaking with the authority of a much longer experience, assured them that Saint Brigid “was just as apt to leave them their dinners down below”; and at last persuaded them to come and see. She was anxious to reclaim her sacks and resume her grass-cutting. And, “I declare to goodness,” Mac exclaimed, as they emerged from the wood, “she’s left it in a basket. There it is near the big stones. Come along, and look what’s in it.”

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

“Musha, good gracious! and there it is sittin’ wid itself, sure enough,” Matty said. “Where’s it come from at all—unless it’s from herself? A grand, new little hamper.”

“If there’s *all* our dinners in it,” Aylmer remarked discontentedly, when they had raced up to the hamper, “it doesn’t look very big. The plates’ll take up nearly all the room.”

“Of course she knows perfitley well that savages don’t want plates,” said Mac, who was fumbling with the fastenings. “Which way do you pull the little peggy thing—do you know, Matty?”

“Suppose somebody owns it,” Matty said, hanging back; “and suppose the pólis was comin’ along the road there, and we meddlin’ with it.” Matty’s eyes were visibly enlarged and darkened by the horror of the imagined situation.

“Savages and saints isn’t any affair of the pólis *at all*,” Mac said, prescribing the constabulary their duties without hesitation, and throwing back the hamper lid with a creaky jerk: “Whoof! Is it nothing but old flowers?”

On the top, indeed, lay some sprays of white frosted blossoms, tied with wonderful silvery

MAC'S ADVENTURES

satiny knots and bows. Mac flung them down on the grass disdainfully, but Matty and Rosy picked them up reverentially, as if they were feathers from an angel's wing. Under them was a paper bag full of small sugary biscuits of all shapes and hues; and these the boys regarded with more respect. Then there came thick slices of dark plum cake, iced and almonded, and a number of softly flushed peaches, and a heavy bunch of bloomy, purple grapes. Next an oval card box of glistening, crystallised fruits; and, lastly, a round one of bonbons. "Joggolates!" Aylmer said triumphantly, on seeing these, "and it was me ordered them. But you can have ones a-piece."

When all these things were spread out on the grass, Mac said: "Let's have the biscuits first. You needn't grab them with your two hands at once, Aylmer, like a wolf."—Aylmer, with his mouth full, said something indistinctly about savages.—"Come along, Matty and Rosy."

But Matty turned away, drawing her old shawl closer about a disconsolate face. "They're not our dinners, for sartin," she said; "ne'er a pitaty is there at the bottom—ne'er a one. But belike she might send them

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

another day, Rosy, when there's nobody in it, only you and me. Themselfes is some manner of Quality, so she wouldn't be mindin' the likes of us. It's time we got the grass cut. Come along, Rosy. Say 'No, thankee.' "

Rosy, however, on the contrary, said : "Plase," and accepted a handful of miniature stars and crowns and crescents, pink and white and yellow, at which she looked for a minute half doubtfully. It seemed like eating up things that were almost too pretty to touch. But after she had tasted the first sparing crumb, the rest very rapidly vanished. Matty also was tempted irresistibly by a rose-and-apricot-coloured cockleshell, which Mac would have her take. It held cream, flavoured with something delicious ; yet before it was finished she stopped as if she had remembered a trouble, and suddenly looked ready to cry. She was thinking of some people in a dark house-room not very far off, and this made her glance in the direction of the road leading to it. And her glance grew into a stare, for just then round the corner ran a figure whose white robes swept after her over the grass—one flounce was torn and trailing—as softly as foam, and whose bright head had a covering not in the least like any of the caps and hoods Matty was used to

MAC'S ADVENTURES

see. The feathery brim had got pushed far back in her haste, showing a fluff of golden hair and a flower-tinted face. "Bedad, then it *was* herself brought them their dinner," Matty said, in an awe-stricken tone, while Rosy edged up to her, grasping a handful of her shawl, as if for protection, and both little girls began to retreat.

It was really the bringer of the hamper, who, having met with young Lambert May on his bicycle, and sent him speeding to fetch assistance, had now been drawn back by the fascination of fear to the lough side. The sight of the four ragged children there gave her a hope and dread of news, as she hurried up to the little girls with eager questions.

"Be curtseyin', Rosy, be curtseyin'," Matty meanwhile was exhorting. "Saints is a great sort of Quality."

"Do you know anything, please, about the hat floating there in the water?" said the stranger.

"Ay, miss—Saint Brigid," Matty said, curtseying extraordinarily low; "it fell off the little boy's head, and he fightin' with the other. There's the two of them now," and she pointed to Mac and Aylmer squatting by the hamper in their sacks.

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

“ Oh,” the stranger said, looking much relieved. “ And did you happen to see two other little boys in blue and white sailor suits anywhere about ? ”

“ Ay, did I,” said Matty.

“ And where did they go to ? ”

“ There’s the two of them now at their dinners,” Matty said, pointing again to the figures by the hamper.

“ Those poor children ! Are you quite sure ? Why, they seem to have hardly any clothes.”

“ Sure, there’s the little coat of one of them in the water, too,” said Matty. “ It’s about drowndin’ himself dead he was raichin’ after the hat, so I got him out of it, and we loaned him the ould sack while it would be dryin’, but it’s fell in again.” Matty had no wish to deceive ; but her language was ambiguous, and it conveyed to her hearer the impression that she had rescued the child from a watery grave. She was astonished when this beautiful young lady, “ and herself a saint,” said : “ Then you are a *very* good little girl, and I’m very much obliged to you indeed.” It seemed to her that since she was in such favour, she might perhaps venture to put in a word about the potatoes so often bespoken in vain. But just as she was

MAC'S ADVENTURES

beginning : " If you please, Miss—Saint Brigid, ma'am——" Saint Brigid ran away to speak to the little boys.

Mac, when he saw her approaching, kicked Aylmer, and said : " It's just a girl dressed up ; we needn't mind about being savages to her." But Aylmer had too many chocolate drops in his mouth to have room for any words.

" So you found the hamper, I see," the girl said, which seemed to Mac such an obvious remark that he ignored it, and replied : " You're quite welcome to some of these biscuits. I think the white ones are the best."

" I thought you'd like them," she said. " I hope the grapes aren't crushed ; I brought the biggest bunch I could find."

" Did Saint Brigid send you ? " said Mac.

" Saint Brigid ? Oh, no. What do you mean ? "

" If she didn't, I don't see how you could be thinking anything about it," said Mac. " I ordered our dinners up there at the well, because we haven't caught anything yet except bites, and we can't go back to the house until it's ever so late in the evening. And I ordered chicken and mashed potatoes, but I s'pose she forgot it ; I wish she hadn't, for I'm pretty hungry, and we *have* to be staying here."

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

“Why?” said the girl, looking puzzled.

“Because of a nasty aunt that’s coming this afternoon,” said Mac; “so we’ve went away to live wild like savages till she’s gone. But I dare say the old pest will stay *bovvering* there till it’s quite dark. People you don’t want are always everywhere.”

“And taking one to school, and asking one the dates of the kings and queens and things,” came in a grumbling mumble, for Aylmer’s mouth was still full. “I wish they’d all died the same time, and I wish plaguy old aunts would go and see somebody else.”

“Well, I’m sorry you both think so badly of aunts,” said the girl, “for I believe I am your aunt Amy. But I don’t know any dates myself.”

“Nor seven times twice times?” said Aylmer.

“Not without adding up,” she said.

“*She’s* nobody’s aunt,” Aylmer said to Mac, in a very low whisper; “you needn’t believe it. She *might* be Saint Brigid, for they said she had white clothes; but she’s no more like an aunt than I am.”

“Well, you needn’t bellow at the top of your voice—she’ll hear you,” Mac said, giving him an indignant shove, which Aylmer returned.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Their aunt did hear and see, and to change the subject said : " I hope you offered the little girls something ? "

" They're wanting potatoes," said Mac, " because they and their mother haven't had anything this long while except pot scrapings of *yella male*—that's what she called it, and it can't be very nice. But they wouldn't take our things—only a few biscuits."

" They do look half starved, poor children," she said. " And, by the way, which of you was it who got so nearly drowned ? You ought really to come home and change your things."

" We weren't either of ourselves nearly drowned, only our hats," said Mac ; " people shouldn't exaggelate about nothing at all."

" Oh, they've been telling tales, have they ? " Aylmer said, frowning all over his dirty round face. " Then they may do without any of my joggolates that I ordered. *Now* I won't keep a single one for them."

" Pig ! " said Mac.

The girl in white gathered up some slices of plum cake and ran off with them after Matty and Rosy, who had gone to untether the goat. She had scarcely reached them, when she heard shrill voices arising behind her, and she

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

looked round, thinking that the threatened hostilities had broken out. But she saw that two tall, black-looking policemen had arrived, and that one of them was talking to the little ragged boys. Mac seemed to be answering him with fluent defiance ; but Aylmer suddenly jumped up, and fleeing towards her, still clutching his box of chocolate, grasped her skirts with a hand which left its mark and began to roar. The policeman following him, said : “ Beg pardon, miss, but did you know them childer was making free with your hamper of sweets ? ”

“ They’re my nephews,” she said, and Aylmer made no attempt to repudiate the connection. So the policeman withdrew, apologetic and rather scandalised. “ That was a queer start,” he said to his comrade, as they walked away. “ A one of them was eatin’ that rapacious I thought he was starvin’, and I come as near as anything takin’ him in charge. They hadn’t the look of belongin’ to anybody respectable.”

The constables were hardly out of sight when there appeared on the scene Lambert May, bringing with him the doctor, and several men with ropes and poles, and Father Daly, and quite a crowd of children and

MAC'S ADVENTURES

women, some of whom had already begun to say that the poor little crathurs' mother was to be pitied that night when she heard what had happened them. But their aunt Amy really was to be pitied, in a less tragical way, when she had to explain that nothing had happened to them at all. For she felt ashamed of the commotion roused by her false alarm, and did not like to think how foolish she must appear to Lambert May. Altogether it did seem hard that she should have given up a garden-party, and spoiled her new gown, only to frighten and make herself ridiculous, and to be disowned with contempt by her relations. Moreover, her disreputable-looking nephews proceeded to behave so badly that she felt quite abashed, and they talked so strangely about savages and Saint Brigid that she almost thought they must be demented. Mac, especially, being hungry and fractious, stamped furiously in a puddle when requested to put on his boots and stockings, and declared that he wasn't going to be ordered about by people who came bothering and pretending they were everybody's aunts. His good-humour was not restored until he had been invited thoroughly to inspect Lambert May's highly-polished roadster, and even to sit on the saddle and see

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

how entirely out of reach the pedals were. By the time that she had helped him to lace his boots, it is true, he had begun to take a more tolerant view of his aunt's character. But when he said good-bye to her at the gate he gave her a bit of, no doubt, mortifying intelligence.

"The man with the bicycle thinks you are very horrid," he said.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Because," said Mac, "when he was showing it to me, I asked him if he thought you were *his* aunt, and he said: 'Oh, no, indeed, she's not my aunt, *thank goodness!*' But next time I see him, I'll tell him you aren't as nasty as most aunts—unless," Mac continued interrogatively, "you maybe aren't one at all, and only letting on, the same way that we were about the savages?"

There was one person, however, to whom the afternoon seemed ending in a sudden blaze of joy. Matty Shanahan just about that time was rushing home through shade and shine at the top of her speed. Such a pace did she attain that Rosy M'Clonissy, following with the little goat in tow, and daring not to be left behind, tugged and panted, and called injunctions to stop, and to come on. Matty

MAC'S ADVENTURES

never heeded. For she was on her way to give her mother the wonderful golden sixpenny-bit that the lovely young lady—some sort of Quality or Saint—had run after her to put into her hand.

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

An Invincible Ignoramus

I

“**I**T’S themselves are the great villins,” old Mrs. Gahan was saying, when Mac began to heed the conversation. He had come out after tea with Molly Lennon, the housemaid, to pick raspberries down at the far end of the kitchen-garden, where only a grassy dyke, surrounded by intermittent privets and hawthorns, divides it from the orchard. On this dyke, at a gap, was seated old Mrs. Gahan, returned from fetching milk up at the farmyard, while by her stood two or three neighbours, also with cans under their shawls, and Fergus Gilligan, the ploughman, on his way home from the mangold field. They had talked a long while before Mac, having eaten as many of the small, soft, red thimbles as seemed good to even a six-year-old taste, found leisure to pause and listen. “Great villins,” Mrs. Gahan said, “and thieves of the world entirely them doctors do be. They’d as lief cut off a body’s arm or leg as look at it any day.”

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"Ay, would they, and liefer," said Katty Doyle, "and they chargin' pounds and pounds for doin' it."

"That's what they're after now, wantin' to fetch poor Miss Gracie up to Dublin, you may depind," said Mrs. Gahan; "wunst they get her up there, they'll have the little wake foot off her in next to no time, and lame her for the rest of her life, that won't be long, the crathur."

"Twinty pities it is the Colonel to be away the now," said Julia Hegarty; "himself wouldn't let one of them widin an ass's bray of her. Ragin' he'll be when he hears tell of it, for Miss Gracie was his great darlint ever, from the first day he set eyes on her."

"Little he had to do then," said Mrs. Gahan, "to be puttin' a stepmother over her, and she not the size of a sandhopper, nor the young mistress scarce three years in her clay."

"And takin' off wid himself to the end of the world after that again, and lavin' the little crathur to contind wid that one alone," said Julia Hegarty. "The laist he might do would be to stay and protect her. But what chance has she now at all?"

"Sorra one," declared Mrs. Gahan; "the stepmother's young and flighty in herself, sup-

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

posin' she's nought worse. Glad enough she'd be of an excuse for takin' a jaunt up to Dublin, if it was about cuttin' the head off poor Miss Gracie they were, let alone the foot."

"And it might as well be the one as the other, in my opinion," Katty Doyle said gloomily; "for get her death she will among them all, that's certain, and she a very delicate little fairy of a thing ever. Goodness may pity her—two Dublin doctors terrifyin' her on the one day; and Willie Byrne, that dhruv them over from the station, said they were as ugly-lookin' big men as ever you witnessed."

"This Mrs. George has no likin' for the Abbey sure enough," said Molly Lennon; "it's only of an odd while she stirs out of the house, and to-day she was tellin' her own maid about packin' the boxes—so Kate Macredy says. And after the luncheon the ould master rung for Mr. Fitzgibbon, and he——"

"Whist now, and don't be talkin'," Mrs. Gahan said in Gaelic, suddenly becoming aware that a small sun-browned face framed in a halo of straw-hat brim was looking through a raspberry bush, and that the dark blue eyes belonging to it had an alert and interested expression.

"Ah, sure Master Mac has plenty of wit;

MAC'S ADVENTURES

he wouldn't be repeatin' a word he hears," said Molly Lennon.

"Great stuff and nonsense I'd be repeating," said Mac. "I suppose somebody's been putting ideas into your heads that it's hard enough to get out again. And I suppose you think that doctors go about with axes and hatchets in their black bags as if they were Jack the Giant-killer, who never was any such person in reality. Why, I dare say even Miss Grace doesn't believe that."

"True for you, Master Mac," said Fergus Gilligan, whose shock of grizzled black hair and encroaching beard had framed an aggrieved and anxious countenance as he listened. "There's some people's tongues might be shortened a trifle anyway, and no harm done. It's the quare ould gabbin' they have about nothin' in the world, for I dunno what they consait ails Miss Gracie, unless it's expectin' her to be leppin' hedges and ditches, and headin' haystacks they are. And I defy forty stepmothers to offer to do a hand's turn agin her, no matter where his Honour is; he'd get word of it one way or the other. But I'm step-pin' along home, and good night to yous all."

"I'll go with him," said Mac, scrambling up the bank and jumping down on the other side,

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

all except a square shred of brown holland sleeve, which remained behind, thorn-grabbed. "Sticky hedges are a plague," he remarked, as he joined the big man, who was walking away.

"Will you be lavin' Master Mac up at the house, Fergus?" Molly Lennon called after them across the long tree-shadows and gold-on-green interspaces of the westward-sloping orchard.

"Foolish in his mind Fergus does be about Miss Gracie," said Mrs. Gahan, "the same way he was about the young mistress. But rael comical did it be to see him carryin' her up and down, when you might as well take and lift a kitten, for any weight she was, and makin' as much work over her as if he'd never heard tell of e'er another baby in Ireland. And now he won't let on aught's amiss wid her, barrin' the stepmother, that he can't abide the thoughts of. So what wid it all he's in a fine distraction these times, and talkin' onraisonable, poor man."

The flushed rays of that same sunset were still dazzling the windows along the seaward side of the big house, where Fergus Gilligan duly left Master Mac. As he stumped down the long passage to his room, a door on his right hand stood ajar, emitting a wedge of amber

MAC'S ADVENTURES

light, and through it a voice called, "Oh, Mac, won't you come in and say good night to Gracie?" while a second voice added shrilly, "I likes the Big Boy, if it's him. But I needn't say good night to anybody for hourses and hourses."

In a bow-window across the wide room Mac saw two girls sitting. One of them was quite an old person, being about twenty, and the other, being four, a mere infant; so Mac reckoned ages. Her flossy head was much the colour of a little duckling's, which made the pansy-brown eyes seem strangely dark, especially as they contrasted again with the faintest tinge of shell-pink in a disproportionately small face. A miscellany of toys lay strewn around her, discarded for the amusement of rolling her stepmother's rings about the floor. The sunbeams kindled many-hued sparkles in them as they ran hither and thither over the slippery grass matting; and when one circled out of reach she followed it with difficulty, neither walking nor creeping, but pulling herself along by legs of tables and chairs in a helpless sort of way. It was this, and not any probable mishap to her trinkets, that caused their owner to look on with concern.

Indeed, the twelve months since her marriage had made Sylvia Rowan feel as if her score of

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

years had been doubled, so many were the cares that they had brought. First and chief of these was her husband's appointment to the command of a military expedition into such outlandish regions that exile to another planet would have been hardly a more "separable spite." Hence her establishment at Inverdrum Abbey, remote in wildest Mayo, where old Sir George, her father-in-law, feeble in health and spirits, emerged from his study only to utter dismal predictions, or let fall inadvertent regrets at his son's remarriage; where the same sentiment was more or less overtly expressed by a household who looked with disfavour on the successor of "the poor young mistress"; and where her little stepdaughter, in whom she had hoped to find an object of the happiest interest, had soon begun to show very disquieting symptoms. "Frittin' after the poor Colonel," was the general diagnosis, to which the speaker commonly added: "And sure what chance has *he* of ever settin' foot here again?" Matters improved somewhat by and by; when her nephew, little Mac Barry, was lent to her for the summer. Mac had been a friend of hers before her marriage, and although he now saw fit to call her "Aunt Stepmother," a title which she disliked hardly

MAC'S ADVENTURES

less than Grace's crude "new mamma," he did not withdraw his countenance from her, nor entirely withhold his company from Grace, who unwittingly humoured him by describing him as "the Big Boy." Both children had a favourite, whose good opinion she did not possess.

One morning, shortly after her arrival at Inverdrum, she was coaxing Grace to eat an appreciable quantity of breakfast, when the child said wistfully, turning away from her dainty repast, "I'd like Figgy-Giggy."

"Oh, I wonder if we can get it," her step-mother said, brightening up. "Kate, Miss Grace says she would like some figgy-giggy. What is it? A sort of jam?"

But Kate disappointingly replied, "Sure, not at all, miss—ma'am. It's the name she has for me sister's brother-in-law, Fergus Gilligan the ploughman, that does be carryin' her about of an odd while, and showin' her his horses. Poor Miss Gracie wouldn't look at e'er a bit of jam these times if it was made of pearls and diamonds." Mrs. Rowan listened with an anxious mind.

But on this brilliant midsummer day her troubles had reached a doleful crisis. What Kate Macredy termed "a powerful wakeness

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

settled in Miss Gracie's foot " having led to a consultation of eminent specialists, their verdict was by no means reassuring. It suggested a sojourn in Dublin for treatment, including plaster bandages and possibly an operation, a word which filled Mrs. Rowan's heart with vague terror. Sir George when appealed to had declared that in such hopeless cases it was our duty to clutch at every straw. Then he had rung for his butler to announce that Mrs. George would be leaving the Abbey in a few days; and he had reflected, not without a gleam of satisfaction, that he need not dress for dinner when she was gone.

His daughter-in-law was too much oppressed with responsibility and alarm to feel any relief at the prospect of quitting dreary Inverdrum. Still she saw the expediency of taking a cheerful view, and with that intent she now said to the children, " Don't you think it would be very nice if we all went to Dublin next week, by train, you know, and stayed there for a while ? "

" Rather middling nice it might be, if it wasn't nasty," said Mac ; " but *I'm* not wanting excuses for taking jaunts to places every minute. And I dare say the sea doesn't reach to it, so that there's nothing except dirty dry roads for a Person to walk on."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"I don't want to go in trains," said Grace. "Figgy-Giggy'll bring me wif the horses."

"Let me tell you," said Mac, "that if anybody was caught destroying the streets of Dublin with horses and a plough, the pólís would put them all in prison, with handcuffs."

Upon receipt of this solemn warning Grace flung a small handful of rings clattering across the floor, and said vehemently, "Oh, I won't go anywhere at all. I'll stay here wif Kate, and she'll show me the waves comin' in." So Sylvia could not flatter herself that her plan had made a favourable impression. As for Mac, he collected the rings carefully, and hung them on a button-hook. "She's sleepy," he said, "and fractish." Grace, who seldom gave way to tantrums, watched him with large eyes full of remorse and awe. "If you were a good enough little girl," Mac said to her severely when he had finished, "perhaps Kate might show you the Isle of the Blest, that's floating in the sea not so very far off from here. Pat Denny saw it one day when he was out in the Sound beyond Inish Bofin fishing with his poor father, may he rest in glory. It's the same sort of place as heaven, Fergus Gilligan says, and I should think it was handier to get to than Dublin. Couldn't we go there instead, Aunt

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

Stepmother ? In a boat, of course. I dare say Gracie would like it better than the train, she's so easily frightened of nothing."

"Oh, dear, Mac, it's all nonsense. There's no such island, and we couldn't possibly go to it," his aunt said, more decidedly than usual. His suggestion struck her as being ill-omened and slightly profane.

So Mac went off, somewhat affronted in his turn.

II

One afternoon, not many days later, Mac was again in the kitchen-garden. Red raspberries still glowed softly among their silvery-lined leaves, beneath sunshine that was still high summer's, but there had been time for a tragical event to happen at Inverdrum. On the very evening before they were all to have started for Dublin, Gracie had herself taken by Kate Macredy to see her beloved big waves rolling in. Kate as usual wheeled the little carriage to the opening of a footpath cut round the sea-cliff, at whose base a white rim of the Atlantic perpetually chafes and foams. Hence it was supposed that, also as usual, she set out with the child in her arms to walk along the narrow path ; this, however, could be only

MAC'S ADVENTURES

conjectured, for neither of them had reappeared. The empty perambulator with its fleecy blue and white rug aflutter in the breeze, waiting at the entrance of a track which led nowhither save to wide ocean, confirmed the searchers' darkest fears. Sure-footed and careful as Kate Macredy was known to be, it seemed plain that some fatal slip at one of the many perilous points had sent maid and child headlong into the depths below. "And 'deed now ten or a dozen people, let alone a couple," said old Mrs. Gahan, "might very aisy be droppin' down over the edge there, like slates slitherin' off a roof, and nobody the wiser, unless it was the say-gulls. And sight or light of them may ne'er a one else behold till the Day of Judgment; or by chance they might be got to-morra washed up widin a stone's throw of the very same place."

Such woeful alternatives had been generally accepted as alone possible, long before this bright Saturday afternoon. For Mac, indeed, the tragedy had already begun to loom far off across the hazy distance of three weeks filled with the capacious days by which his time was still measured. He had become used to missing Grace and Kate Macredy, and to seeing Aunt Stepmother grown a sorrowful little black

figure silently moping, and to hearing the calamity discussed from every point of view by the other members of the household. It had been on the whole a tedious period, especially as Fergus Gilligan had also waxed gloomily taciturn, and was working in an inaccessible field. The coming of Mac's favourite Aunt Amy on a visit to her sister had latterly in some degree compensated him for this loss; but just at present she was engaged in entertaining a large family party, which the arrival of two or three sets of condoling cousins had fortuitously brought together. Mac's experiences were in fact illustrative of his often-propounded theory that people one doesn't want are always everywhere, for he had failed to find indoors any congenial haunt uninvaded by the stranger. From the drawing-room he had been routed by the sudden trooping in of the first detachment; two unknown ladies had greeted him effusively as he passed through the hall; and when he turned for refuge towards the library, a sound of unfamiliar voices gave him timely warning ere he reached the wrong side of the half-open door. Some one was speaking in a high-pitched, excited tone.

"Oh, yes, the elders wouldn't hear of the match, on account of insufficient means, so it

MAC'S ADVENTURES

had to be broken off. There was a most impassioned parting scene. I believe he went down on his knees and kissed the hem of her garment."

"I always wonder," said a calmer voice, "who relates incidents of this kind in the first instance. Hardly the principals, one must suppose—but who else can know?"

"Well, at any rate," the other voice rejoined, with a touch of resentment, as if at being checked in a flight of romantic fancy, "it's a fact that Lambert May was seen in the village yesterday. So as Amy Barry came down here only last week, he certainly hasn't lost much time in getting within reach of her again."

Mac had not stayed to hear even this fragment, but had betaken himself out of doors, making by a warily chosen route for the kitchen-garden. It seemed to him the safest asylum, because, he argued, "if one goes where there's flowers, they'll be coming out bothering, and saying, 'Oh how *lovely* your chrysanthemopes are! Is that a *souvenir-dear-John*?' " He had neglected, however, to bear in mind the possible attractions of small fruit; and so it happened that as he approached a large gooseberry bush, a figure hurriedly rose up from crouching in a skin-littered space. This was an elderly gentleman, who looked at once

disconcerted and relieved by the interruption and the insignificance of the interrupter.

"Hullo, young man," he said, "I suppose you've come to look for some of these ambers. I can recommend them highly."

"No, thank you," said Mac, with sincere politeness, "I'd a great deal rather that you went on finishing them all yourself."

He was chagrined at finding that his great-uncle preferred to enter into conversation; however, as it turned upon agricultural matters, in which they both were interested, he did not feel it irksome. With pleasure he listened to an account of the Clontragh cart-horses, and in exchange imparted much information, on the authority chiefly of Fergus Gilligan, enriched with experiences and theories of his own. By the time that they had walked twice round the garden, Mac had formed a favourable opinion of his new acquaintance, and when the latter spoke of returning to the house, thought it but friendly to put him on his guard. "You'll find it full of all sorts of strange people," the warning ran, "girls and old ladies in black. Aunt Amy's busy minding them, so you won't be able to get her to do anything. And you can't imagine the nonsense they're talking, all in a gabble together, like the hens being fed."

MAC'S ADVENTURES

Perhaps Mr. Staveley bethought him of his wife and daughters as among those whose conversational gifts were thus appraised ; perhaps, too, he remembered the undignified attitude in which he had been surprised, and wished at parting to leave a more suitable impression ; or perhaps he considered it his duty to seize this last opportunity of repressing self-sufficient tendencies in his youthful kinsman. At any rate he replied, " Ah well, young man, we mustn't expect people to be always talking like wiseacres. They may have too much sense to do that. And nobody, I assure you, knows quite all about everything—not even the youngest of us, though he may be a great hand at opening drills, and grubbing mangolds. I hope you'll learn a little ignorance before you're much older."

This sarcasm, cruelly pointed with its allusion to some small vaingloriousings, did not miss its mark. Mac turned away from the garden-gate, seriously mortified by the discovery that he had done quite the wrong thing. Overmuch knowledge, it appeared, was a mistake, which actually led to unfavourable comparisons between a Person and the persons whom he considered most absurd. He pondered over this new problem set by a perplexing world all the way down the cow-lane, and across Big

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

Barnawn meadow, to the Lennons' cottage, where Fergus Gilligan lodged. It stood in a field, the furthest-off edge of which was waved with sand-hills, letting through blue glimpses of sea ; and here he hoped to find Fergus returned from work, not that Fergus's company was by any means what it had been before the loss of Miss Gracie.

Nobody was about near the cottage, but just as Mac reached it, a flock of sheep began to defile one by one through a neighbouring gap in the fence, and to disperse themselves slowly over the field. He stood still to watch them so intently that he did not know old Michael Lennon had come out, until a voice said close by, " Well, Master Mac, is it thinkin' to head them back you are ? Ne'er a bit of them miscreants'll be controlled by aught barrin' the dog ; we must get Glen to them."

" No," said Mac, checking the interruption with a wave of his hand, " I'm only counting their legs. Just stop a minute—two, three—this one has four."

" Whethen now, Master Mac, I'd suppose you knew that much widout goin' to the trouble of reckonin'," said old Michael.

" Indeed, I don't," said Mac, who seldom did things by halves. " The wisest person on earth," he averred with solemnity, " couldn't

MAC'S ADVENTURES

tell you how many legs a sheep has without counting them, unless he was a perfect idiot, and thought he knew everything in the world. It might have growed a different number. Now here's two of them coming at once, I mustn't stay talking."

He resumed his counting, while the old man, after looking on for a few moments with a concerned expression, went back into the house. "I hope to goodness," he said to the two people whom he had left in the kitchen, "that the little young gentleman isn't goin' wrong in his head on the Family, over and above everythin' else. He's outside there now talkin' rael foolish, and he was used to have plenty of sinse."

Fergus Gilligan and Molly Lennon, who had been deep in discourse during his short absence, found him as disturbing as Mac had done.

"'Twould be the thousand pities, bedad," Fergus remarked despondently.

"Sure, it's only natural for childer to be talkin' oddly," Molly said, reassured by more experience; "nobody minds them. As for Master Mac, he has me tormented these times romancin' about the Isle of the Blest out in the say there. Yesterday he was wonderin' whether it was there the drownded people went to, because it would be more convanient like to

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

them than heaven, he said. Quare and ould-fashioned he is, but right enough in his head."

"Faix now, that same might be the very way to manage it," Fergus said meditatively. "If he took that notion about it, ne'er a one of them would think aught he said was any more than romancin'."

"I'd a right to be steppin' along now and fetchin' him home," said Molly.

Outside the door Fergus and she took up the thread of their discussion.

"If you could give me e'er a hand wid conthrin' it, Molly, yourself 'ud be the great darlint entirely."

"Ay, would I! It's the fine darlint I might contrive meself to be. But there's some people 'ud liefer be a darlint widout conthrin'."

"And who's sayin' but what yourself's that sort as well?"

"Sure maybe so, Fergus, if you wasn't took up ever wid somebody else or somethin'. And supposin' now he went, and aught mishappint him——"

"What harm at all 'ud he get comin' along wid me for a bit of a row in the little boat, if it was fine to-morra, the way he done times and agin? Only the Family's delicate about

MAC'S ADVENTURES

his goin' on the water the now ; as if one drowndin' was bound to bring another follyin' it, like them sheep leppin' through the gap ; so 'twould be handier if I got to taking him unbeknownst."

"You're the quare man to consait 'twould be unbeknownst, wid the child himself tellin' the whole of it—whatever it is—the minyit he comes back."

"I wouldn't put it past Master Mac to have the wit to hould his tongue. And 'twould do near as well if the rest of them had the wit to not believe any quare talk was out of him. At all events we must chance it."

"Well, then, if he goes off wid you to-morra, I needn't let on anythin' about the boat, and belike that'll contint you, for what more can I do ? But you'll not be keepin' him out after dark, or we'll all go distracted together."

"Iligant 'twill contint me, Molly, jewel ; and we'll be home agin along wid the crows, whatever happins," Fergus assured her. "If seein' Master Mac doesn't pacify her," he added to himself, "what'll I do at all ? for she might soon destroy herself frettin'. And she thrivin' real grand till she took this fantigue about him. The conthrariness of things is untould."

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

III

The strip of strand that runs by Inverdrum Abbey was basking in sunshine on the third morning after this conversation, and along with it also basked young Lambert May, who had established himself on some tumbled boulders near the mouth of a sandy-banked lane. Outwardly he was doing nothing except bask, inwardly he was meditating in no satisfied mood. His thoughts were, however, presently diverted by the emergence from the breen of a very small boy in brown holland and broad-brimmed straw hat, who came stumping down with a determined and purposeful air. On reaching the strand he stood still for a moment, and then trotted a little way to the right, but soon halted again, and upon consideration ran back about as far in the opposite direction. Here he came to a dead stop, pausing for a while in evident perplexity ; after which he slowly and intermittently approached the heap of boulders, glancing towards them from time to time with a wistful irresolution. Accordingly, when he came near enough, Lambert inquired whether he was looking for anybody.

“ I suppose you’re not a policeman ? ” Mac

MAC'S ADVENTURES

replied interrogatively. "Not any kind of a one—even in the wrong sort of clothes?"

"I've got nothing to do with the police at all," said Lambert, who believed this to be a reassuring statement. But Mac looked disappointed. "Then I don't want to find my way, thanks," he said in a reserved tone, "at least not till I get to the barracks."

"You'll have to walk a good step before you come to any barracks," said Lambert; "I dare say I may know the place as well as a policeman. And you needn't *ask*, you see," he added, connecting Mac's difficulty with precepts of prudence, enjoined upon him probably by city caretakers, "only just say where you are going."

Mac put aside this disingenuous sophistry with due disapproval. "It would be the same thing only different," he said firmly; "besides, now that I think of it, nobody could tell anybody the way to a person who's mostly walking about."

"If the house he lives in doesn't walk about along with him, you might wait there till he comes home," Lambert said.

Mac, who did not consider himself on jocular terms with the stranger, vouchsafed no direct reply to this suggestion. "The greatest big

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

baby on earth," he observed presently, be-
thinking him of newly adopted views, and
finding a retort therein, "wouldn't suppose
or imagine that it knew the way to everybody's
house, when there's dozens and millions of
them, so that nobody knows which is which
except the postman."

"Unluckily I'm not a postman either," said
Lambert.

"If you were anything *at all*," said Mac, "I
suppose you wouldn't be sitting about doing
nothing at this hour of the morning."

"True for you," Lambert admitted, some-
what ruefully.

"Of course it's your holiday perhaps," Mac
hastened to add, apprehending that he had
delivered a rash judgment. "Barney McQueen
often has one on Monday. He says it's a poor
case for a man to be workin' like a baste of the
field from morning till night, so he takes a day
off now and again, to make sure that it isn't
an old cart-horse he is all the while. Maybe
that's what you're doing."

"Oh, I keep Saint Monday all the week,"
said Lambert, "if you know what that means."

"I know nothing about saints," said Mac,
"except that they have gold plates round their
heads in pictures, to show how goody-goody

MAC'S ADVENTURES

they are. I don't believe there are any of them living on the Isle of the Blest, so they must all have gone to heaven."

But Lambert gave only a divided attention to Mac's hagiology, for as he listened it struck him that there was something familiar in the tones of the clear, high-piping voice, and the expression of the small, shrewd, sun-browned visage.

"I say," he interrupted, after an earnest scrutiny, "did you come from Inverdrum Abbey, Sir George Rowan's place?"

"I did so," said Mac; "it's only along the back shrubbery, and down the cow-lane, and across the two big fields, to the gap that's stopped with furze, but anybody who isn't the size of a bullock can get through into the boreen."

"Why, then, you must be my old friend Mac Barry," said Lambert; "I was sure I'd seen you somewhere, but, of course, you've grown a good bit in a year. Do you remember last summer in Connemara, how you scared your aunt Amy out of her wits one day, when you were paddling in the lake and lost your hat? And how I trundled you home afterwards on my bike? You hardly would remember, though, all that time."

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

Mac looked at him meditatively for some moments. "I think I do remember that I've forgotten you," he said; "but if you're the bicycle man, I can tell you Aunt Amy remembers all about you."

"Does she, by Jove!" Lambert exclaimed, suddenly sitting up straight. "How do you know that, Master Mac?"

"How could she have asked me yesterday whether I recollected the time we met you at the lake near the bog, if she hadn't recollected it first herself?" Mac demanded, with the air of a logical tomtit. "It's easy enough recollecting anybody when you've got a photograph to put you in mind. And she has a photograph of you in her writing-case that fell off the table when I was passing, and everything tumbled out on the floor; so then she asked me if I remembered you. The only thing we lost out of it was a little old bit of white heather that we couldn't find again. It was all withered up, but Aunt Amy crept about on the floor ever so long looking for it. She said it was a keepsake."

"And did she say anything else about me?" said Lambert.

"She said about you that it was very good-natured of you to give me a ride; and she said

MAC'S ADVENTURES

about you ”—Mac had to reflect between these reminiscences—“ that we had a very pleasant walk home—and that it was a lovely summer last year—and that things were very different now. But, of course, that *wasn't* about you at all.”

“ Unless she thinks it is my fault, you know,” said Lambert.

“ Why,” Mac said, opening wide eyes of amazement, “ it wasn't you that drowned Gracie and Kate Macredy ? ”

“ What on earth put that notion into your head ? ” said Lambert.

“ It's in your own head, not mine,” said Mac, “ for the reason things are different is because Gracie's drowned. It was a quare upset altogether to Aunt Stepmother,” he continued, reproducing public opinion with much fidelity, “ and she's took it greatly to heart. That's why Aunt Amy's come to be company to her and cheer her up. But when Aunt Amy's fretting herself, I don't see how she can.”

“ How do you know that she is fretting about anything ? ” inquired Lambert.

“ Why, if she isn't, I'd like to know what she's fretting about,” said Mac ; and no rejoinder being ready, he went on : “ Look here,

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

couldn't you come some day and see if you can do anything to amuse her? I dare say she'd like better than anything to watch you and me riding your bicycle up and down the straight walk; and if she wanted to, I wouldn't mind letting her walk on the other side to steady it, though there's not the least occasion."

"There's nothing *I'd* like better, indeed," Lambert said regretfully, "but I'm afraid that your aunt mightn't—things are different, you know, and I'm a different thing."

"Is she out with you?" Mac inquired, after some consideration of this statement.

"Well, I believe she is," said Lambert.

"*Black* out?" said Mac.

"What do you call being 'black' out?" said Lambert.

"Well, if I was black out with her," Mac proceeded to define, "and if I wanted to ride a bicycle on the straight walk, I'd tell her that I didn't care whether she was too huffy to look at me or not. And if I was *very* black out with her," he added reflectively, "I'd maybe say that I didn't see what anybody wanted with a set of ugly old aunts bothering about. But, of course, you needn't say that to her unless you like; for I suppose she isn't your aunt

MAC'S ADVENTURES

really—and, besides, you're maybe only a *little* black out. You could just take no notice of her at all."

Lambert, however, felt that this gracefully simple line of conduct was not for him. "It would never do," he said.

"What are you out about?" inquired Mac.

"It wouldn't be very easy to explain," Lambert said, truthfully enough; and he added mentally that, anyhow, it would be rather a shame to fill the little beggar's mind with the intricacies of a plot petty and mean, such as had wrought the troubles which were now crossing his hitherto pleasant and careless paths. The story was a version of the Dog and the Shadow, complicated by the character of the False Friend. For bone, there had been the offered secretaryship—not a great prize, indeed; still, enough to make an engagement seem not entirely out of the question in the eyes of foreseeing elders; enough, likewise, unluckily, to be an object of desire to another person, who accordingly had diverted Lambert's attention to the Shadow, in the shape of a much more brilliant but quite unattainable appointment, thereby deluding him into a refusal of the substance, and then hastening to secure it for himself. Promises of secrecy, and

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

loyalty to the disloyal, had prevented Lambert from divulging the misrepresentations by which he had been induced to throw away his chance ; so that his conduct looked like a foolish caprice, or a lazy wish to shirk any occupation ; while to the person whose opinion on the subject he most regarded, it might suggest something even worse than that. Thus had it come about that he was dawdling aimlessly through the golden July weather, undergoing a tedious visit to some uncongenial country cousins, for the sake of being in the neighbourhood of Inverdrum Abbey, where he, nevertheless, could not venture to present himself. A very rough outline only of these difficulties could be given to Mac.

“ You see,” said Lambert, “ as you say, I’m out of work.”

“ So’s Tim Lauder,” Mac said encouragingly, “ but he was sacked for nothing at all. He just stayed away one day to go to a decent man’s funeral, so next morning old Peter Molloy up and told him he might step home and wait for the next burying there would be in it. Tim Lauder says that if it was Peter’s, he’d follow it with a heart and a half. I don’t blame him.”

“ Well, but I had the offer of a job,” said Lambert.

“ And didn’t you do it ? ” said Mac.

MAC'S ADVENTURES

"I didn't, because somebody put it into my head that I could get a better one," said Lambert, "and by the time I found out that I couldn't, the first job was gone."

"That was as unhandy as anything," Mac said solemnly. He seemed to be casting about for precedents among the experiences of his rustic friends, and finding none he passed on to another view of the matter. "I don't see that it's any business of Aunt Amy's whether you got it or not. She hasn't to be supporting you in idleness, when you're not working, has she?"

"Certainly not," said Lambert.

"Then it's all nonsense for her to be out with you about it. How do you know that she is? Everybody doesn't know everything," Mac asserted, with a sententiousness formed upon his great-uncle's, "except of a very odd time," he added, lapsing into the style of a less dignified model. "I shouldn't wonder if all the while it's only that she's fretting about Gracie being drowned in heaven."

"Drowned in heaven!" Lambert said aloud, but meaning the comment for himself; "that sounds quaint enough."

"Well, if it isn't exactly heaven, it's next door to the same thing, Fergus Gilligan says,

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

and he's going backwards and forwards this thirty year or more, so he ought to know," said Mac. "That's what Aunt Stepmother's fretting about, partly, at any rate, and partly because she wanted a jaunt to Dublin; but now I suppose she's got no excuse. And Mrs. Gahan and the others say that she'd have let the doctors up there be the destruction of Gracie by way of curing her foot. But I think not; for Fergus Gilligan said he'd make it his business to see there was no such bad work done on her as long as he had a head on his shoulders, and they'd be troubled to reap that off him!"

"Who is this Fergus Gilligan?" inquired Lambert.

"He's working for the old master, man and boy, all the days of his life," said Mac, "and he's mostly ploughing with Tartar and Diamond; and he's got two prizes at a ploughing match, over the best in three parishes; but sometimes he and I go out sailing in the *Granuaile*. I steer. And when we're rowing, he and I can pull Murty Ryan round with one of both our hands—easily. And Mrs. O'Rourke says he always was like a body bewitched about Miss Gracie, and her poor mother, the young mistress, before her. That's why he has no opinion of stepmothers. But

MAC'S ADVENTURES

it's only Aunt Amy I want him to take along with us."

"And it's Fergus Gilligan that you're looking for now?"

"Yes," said Mac; "he said he was very apt to be down on the strand this morning after lobsters, but I don't see him anywhere. I want to ask him about Aunt Amy and the boat. She couldn't come out to-day, because they must write to Gracie's father, for they've put it off so long that they're afraid he might see in a newspaper about Gracie being drowned, she said. And then she said it would be better to call Aunt Stepmother Aunt Sylvia again, for she wasn't anybody's stepmother now. So I asked her if people hadn't any stepmothers in heaven; and she said she thought not, and that Gracie had her own mother there, and didn't want anybody else. So then I asked her if Gracie's own mother was a very old, old woman, in a cap with white frills to it the length of your arm; and she said that Gracie's own mother was quite young, and never wore a cap. So then I told her that she thought wrong, for Gracie wasn't with her own mother at all, or anybody in the least like her."

"What on earth made you say that?" said Lambert.

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

“That’s just the same thing that Aunt Amy asked me too,” said Mac, “but of course I didn’t tell her. And I think we might bring her in the boat and show her. She’d like to see where Gracie is, and Gracie’d like to see her, I dare say, if we left her there for a bit, while Fergus and I were fishing. That would be the best plan.”

“It would be an atrocious plan to play any pranks of the sort,” Lambert said, jumping up. “I hope to goodness that she doesn’t really go out boating in those crazy little canvas catamarans. They would be lunatics to allow her.” Then, rather abashed at finding himself take the situation so seriously on such vague grounds, he reverted to Mac, who was eyeing him sternly. “But I say, Mac, this friend of yours seems to talk a good deal of nonsense to you about taking you to see your poor little cousin, and that sort of thing. I wouldn’t repeat it to your aunts if I were you ; it might vex them, and you may be sure that he is only making a fool of you.”

“And who’s repeating things to my aunts at all, I’d like to know ? ” said Mac, wheeling round, and walking backwards in front of him, so as to transfix him with scornful glances. “I should think that even if you are a most sense-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

less great idiot, you might have heard about the Isle of the Blest, where the drowned people live, when you can see it quite distinctly before your very eyes just round this corner. But I'm going now to look for Fergus, and you needn't believe that I was over there yesterday seeing Gracie, if you don't like——" Here he tripped up over a stone, but recovered himself quickly, and his stump off across the shingle was a very perfect expression of dignified affront.

IV

A quarrel with this newly recovered acquaintance Lambert did not, however, by any means desire, so much really valuable information seeming likely to emerge from among the wild and witless statements insisted on with such tenacity. He hastened accordingly to rejoin Mac, who, far from implacable, was easily propitiated by a serious inquiry about the position of the heavenly island. He pointed with confidence to a craggy shape, which lay softened by the sunny haze out on the mother-o'-pearly sea-lawns, having come into sight, as he had predicted, when they rounded a jut of the cliff.

"That's it," he said. "Do you see the little

weeny nick out of the rock just below the green patch on top? When you get there it's big enough for the boat to fit in quite well; and that's where we landed yesterday, and went up and saw Gracie, and the old woman who isn't her mother, and Kate Macredy. Gracie's twice the child she was before she got drowned, and she can put her two feet under her, and walk right across the floor. She's as happy as the day's long, the old woman says, playing with bits of shells and things at the door, and never a complaint out of her, except just the one time she took the notion into her head, whatever ailed her, to be crying for the Big Boy—that's me. So Fergus brought me to pacify her; and the old woman said it was no sort of thing to do; but she supposed he'd bring over a mad bull raging wild, if the child fancied it, and the one might be apt to do as much mischief as the other. And Fergus said, 'Och, whist, mother; I done accordin' to the best of me judgment.' And that's what I did too. My best judgment was to amuse Gracie playing with the shells. We played ninepins, and she gave me one to bring home. Here it is; she thinks it's a scallop, but it's really only a cockle-shell." Mac produced it from his pocket with a forbearing air, and con-

MAC'S ADVENTURES

tinued : " I suppose when people have been drowned they're so glad to get into any kind of dry place at all, that they aren't wanting to go away again, even if it's rather nasty. If it wasn't for that I don't see why anybody should like being in such a little rocky heaven. There's not a thing in it hardly except stones and slithery seaweed, and the field's as slanty as the roof of a house. Gracie doesn't mind it a bit ; but I can tell you Kate Macredy, her maid that was drowned the same time, hates and detests it. She came running down the path after us, when we were going home, and I heard her telling Fergus that if she'd known what a dreary little doghole of a place it was to be shut up in, she wouldn't have let him spirit herself and the child away to it, not if he'd talked blarney enough to bewitch an old crow."

" Did she say that, by Jove ? " said Lambert.

" And she wanted to come along with us in the boat," said Mac, " only Fergus wouldn't let her offer to set hand or foot on board. And she screeched after us that it was a heavy charge we'd all of us be getting, and finding ourselves locked up before we knew where we were ; which is great nonsense, for I don't believe the pólis care a pin whether she came

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

back with us or not. And, besides that, who was to look after Gracie ? There's no harm in me telling *you* about it," Mac interrupted himself to explain, "because you're not any of the people who mustn't hear a word, or there'll be blue murder in it. You're not one of the servants, or the pólis, or the Family, or anybody *at all*."

"I'll tell you what, Mac," said Lambert, who had been rapidly reflecting while Mac argued thus, "this would be a jolly day for a sail, and I know I can take out the yacht. What would you think of running over there with me now, and paying Gracie another visit ? "

To judge by Mac's way of jumping up, high and straight, at hearing the proposal, he thought very favourably of it indeed ; and though his verbal answer was more sedate, it conveyed assent : "It mightn't be too bad," he said, "and I think we'd better go this instant." So they turned their faces without delay towards the moorings of the *Dana*.

That evening about sunset the little yacht, with all her sails spread, like a white butterfly of amplest pinion, came stealing and fluttering back, making her way to the Abbey pier. Very slowly she came, for the light breeze had

MAC'S ADVENTURES

fallen, so that she could only creep in short, mouse-like runs over the smooth floor, where wild-hyacinth tints shimmered into silver and gold. Her approach was being watched from the strand by several people in several excitements, which increased as the six persons on board gradually became recognisable. Peter Byrne and Larry Sullivan, the boatmen, were not indeed much here nor there, and the General's nephew was an object of quite minor importance ; but Master Mac's presence caused a feeling of relief, for his somewhat happy-go-lucky friend had neglected to leave any message about him, and he had been missed for some hours with regretful apprehensions. "Suppose something had took and happint him too."

When, however, the remaining two passengers, though carefully shawled, were at last identified as Miss Gracie and Kate Macredy, interest waxed intenser, and took differing hues. Those among the onlookers who were not in Fergus Gilligan's secret, which had been kept with, on the whole, wonderfully few leakages, stared aghast at what they regarded as ghostly visitants, and then fled, invoking the protection of the higher powers that alone could cope with such an emergency. Others, more enlightened, who had been watching the *Dana's*

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

movements with anxious minds, now saw their gravest surmises confirmed, and for the most part repaired with the news to the contriver of the plot.

"I wonder where your aunts are likely to be, Mac?" Lambert said, as he escorted his small party up from the landing-place, feeling rather at a loss to know how he might best introduce it.

"Sitting up in Aunt Stepmother's room they always are," said Mac, "for she won't do anything but mope, and set Aunt Amy a bad example. Moping is doing nothing at all, and looking as if everything you saw was about a mile off. It's as stupid as can be," Mac added explanatorily.

"Do you think you could find your aunt Amy, and ask her if she would speak to me for a minute, without telling her why?" said Lambert.

"Considering that I don't know why," said Mac, "and that I do know where she is, I should think I could." And he set off without waiting for further instructions.

That was how it happened that Amy Barry did not finish her walk down to the strand. She had gone out in a sorrowful mood, produced by meditation on subjects such as the likelihood that her sister would fret herself

MAC'S ADVENTURES

into a serious illness, and the fact that Lambert May had been quartered for days past in the adjoining demesne without making any sign. For the moment, however, her uppermost thoughts were anxious ones about Mac, of whom, she had just been informed, "nobody had seen sight or light since breakfast-time." Therefore, when a turn in the shrubbery walk disclosed a small holland-coloured figure posting along towards her, she felt relieved. "Dear me, Mac," she said, "where have you been all day?"

"With the bicycle-man in a *Dana* yacht," said Mac. "Him that you're black out with, you know, about the job he wouldn't take, and the one that he couldn't get. But all the same he wants you to come and speak to him. I don't know why. He's got Gracie along with him, and Kate Macredy, that we brought back in the yacht from heaven on the Isle of the Blest. I thought that people had to stay there always when they'd been drowned, but the bicycle-man says that they aren't drowned at all; and Peter Byrne in the yacht says that they weren't *rightly* drowned anyway; and Larry Sullivan says Fergus Gilligan is the lad who could tell us all about it if he hadn't more wit than to stop to be asked questions. So, will you come along and speak to him?"

“Where is he?” said Amy.

“Down at the pier,” Mac replied, as he supposed truthfully; but the others had followed him and now came into view. Lambert was carrying Gracie and listening to Kate Macredy’s voluble statement of grievances. At the sight of each other both parties involuntarily halted, and Lambert afterwards declared that Amy’s eyes grew large enough to have beheld an ocean liner full of spectres. But Gracie desired to be put down, and making straight for her with a sturdy firmness of gait, uttered a far from wraith-like request. “Where’s Figgy-Giggy?” she said. “And I wants the big bowl full of stirabout.”

“Do you intend to go on being out with him?” Mac inquired of his aunt in an audible aside. “He doesn’t want to, I know, and I think myself it’s not very nice of you, after us taking the trouble of bringing back Gracie, because you were fretting about her, and he says that he and I are the luckiest fellows in Ireland to have got the chance.”

“Oh, Lambert, I don’t understand it a bit,” Amy said, “and you can’t wait to explain it now, for we must get back to the house at once, or that dreadful letter to poor George Rowan will have gone to the post, which would be a

MAC'S ADVENTURES

terrible thing. Sylvia had just finished it when I came out. How heavenly it will be to tear up the detestable black envelope ! ”

She set off running, and Lambert, having picked up Gracie, ran too. Mac following, at a distance perforce, judged from the way in which his aunt was accepting the assistance of the bicycle-man's disengaged hand that they were no longer black out.

In the Abbey farmyard, a few days later, Mac conferred upon Lambert May the privilege of an introduction to his own older friend and oracle, Fergus Gilligan, who, contrary to the neighbours' predictions, had neither gone off with himself nor been lodged in Galway jail. Some talk of legal proceedings had indeed ensued, but had quickly subsided ; for Gracie's return, so much safer and sounder than when she had gone, disposed every one to take a lenient view of Fergus's part in the matter. Fergus himself had by this time become reconciled to the betrayal of his conspiracy, having formed the opinion that to keep Miss Gracie on the Inish unbeknownst until his Honour's home-coming would in any case have been impossible ; and, moreover, that she might do well enough under the step-mother, who was not maybe, so to say, a very wicked woman after all.

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

Fergus also confided to Lambert a further reason for satisfaction with the turn affairs had taken. "You see, sir, makin' up a match between Kate Macredy and meself her people and me own people are this good while. Not that I'd any great wish for it; I'd a dale liefer have Molly Lennon. Howane'er, I wasn't goin' agin them, and they were settlin' us to get married at Michaelmas. But now, since she was stoppin' a while on the Inish, where 'tis livin' meself I'll be, whenever me mother quits out of the little house, Kate says she wouldn't look at me if I walked on me two knees after her round Ireland, which I'd be long sorry to do; for she says she'd get her death wid the dreariness of it in a half-twelve-month. So it's meself and Molly is about gettin' married, and maybe it's all as well that Master Mac knew no better than to be talkin'."

Mac, who was standing on tiptoe, holding on with both hands to the top of the pigsty door, over which he could just see, reverted an indignant countenance, but replied with composure, "As it happens, I did know a great deal better then than to be talking. But I never said I knew everything. And what I don't know now is why a pig wriggles all over

MAC'S ADVENTURES

itself the whole time it's eating its bit of food. I wonder if a human person could ? " And he resumed his observations, with a view, possibly, to future experiments.

About this time a small band of white men, in rather sorry plight, were forcing their way through a Central African forest, which held them in its meshes like moths in some huge and baneful web. Their anxious chief, who was a Connaught man, often solaced himself through toilsome days and wakeful nights with the remembrance that if they emerged some weeks thence into semi-civilisation, he might soon hope for tidings of the little girl whom he had left among wide green fields, beneath cool grey skies, far away in Connemara. He never dreamed that a letter, fraught with news which would have blotted out all his forward-looking thoughts, had been prevented from voyaging out to him, and only just prevented, by the indiscreetness of a very small boy in brown holland.

34, 35 & 36, Paternoster Row,

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The political exigencies which had tempted Francis to force the girl into this marriage, induced him later to sanction a divorce, and after some years a husband whom she loved was found for Jeanne in the person of the Duc de Vendôme.

When in 1555, on the death of her father, Jeanne became Queen of Navarre, and her husband King, Francis, now ruled by Catherine De Medici, tried to extinguish the power of the gallant little kingdom. In the great struggle that followed, her husband preferred the pleasures of Paris and Fontainebleau to the dangers and anxieties of the Court of Navarre.

Vendôme fell in love with a maid of honour at the Court of France. The girl was subdued, it is said, by the instrument of Catherine De Medici, who would destroy her enemies by means, fair or foul, but no misfortune could break Jeanne's spirit. Aided by her dauntless nobles she passed triumphantly through a hundred adventures, and like another Jeanne d'Arc, was the salvation of her country. The end came at Paris, where she died of a mysterious illness, her last hours darkened by the fear that her devotion had been in vain, and that Catherine De Medici would be the ruin of her beloved Navarre and her children.

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The action of the novel takes place partly in Paris, partly in the rich residential quarter of a certain South of England watering-place ; and covers, in time, two of the earliest years of the present century. It recounts the fortunes of a young man of letters, an Anglo-Frenchman, and the sentimental complications in which he finds himself involved. It touches on modern developments in religious thought, in art, and the position of woman. It is a novel of character rather than of incident, though it contains some strongly dramatic scenes. It may be said to have a happy ending, in as far, at least, as the hero is concerned.

New 6s. Novels.

Two Impostors and Tinker

By **DOROTHEA CONYERS**

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy," etc.

Messrs. Hutchinson and Co. have pleasure in presenting a new long novel by the popular Irish author of "The Strayings of Sandy," and other popular hunting stories. The present novel deals with the adventures and various mishaps of a young man who, under his cousin's name, takes a pack of hounds, his sister acting as whip. Tinker is their mongrel terrier. Needless therefore to say that it will delight the thousands of readers who revel in the author's descriptions of hunting life treated as they are in this new book with her native humour.

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Author of "The Key of the Door," "The Straw," etc.

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New 6s. Novels.

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Author of "The Heart of a Child," "Pigs in Clover," etc.

Now in its 54th Thousand.

While this novel introduces the reader in many ways to a world not unlike that depicted in "The Heart of a Child," the story is quite different. Many of the characters are Irish, and the hero is a somewhat quixotic man, who to save pain to certain of his relations, and the character of another, marries and accepts the responsibility of his wife's son, of whom he is not the father. Some of the scenes are laid in Ceylon, and the descriptions of life there are among the most interesting chapters of the book. It is safe to say that this novel promises to be even more popular than "The Heart of a Child," which is undoubtedly one of the author's greatest successes of recent years, and although this new book is half as long again as most six shilling novels, there is not a page of it that any reader will want to skip.

The Bride's Mirror

By **MARGARET BAILLIE SAUNDERS**

Author of "Litany Lane," "Saints in Society," etc.

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New 6s. Novels.

The Rogue's Heiress

By **TOM GALLON**

Author of "Tatterley," etc.

In his new novel, "The Rogue's March," Mr. Tom Gallon has again chosen for his chief character one of those adventurous spirits who hang on the fringe of modern life—not to be dealt with by any ordinary rules, not to be classified under any strict heading. Yet the man who is the moving spirit in the story is an attractive rascal, drawing to himself by sheer audacity all and sundry with whom he comes in contact—for good or ill. How, by the merest chance, this man blunders upon a great secret; what he makes of it; how he starts a great game of blackmail, and how it succeeds; and how a quaint and fantastic love-story is woven throughout it all, the book tells. The writer treats of a phase of life that is always attractive, alike from its pathetic and its humorous side.

The Green Patch

By **BARONESS VON HUTTEN**

Author of "Pam," "Kingsmead," "The Lordship of Love."

A man marries the younger sister of a woman to whom he has unsuccessfully paid his court for years. He takes his young bride to Ceylon, where he owns tea and rubber plantations, but she is aware of her husband's admiration for her sister, and does not realize that he now loves her. They meet a young fellow with whom the husband goes shooting. By an accident the young man is wounded by his companion and loses an eye, and the husband, a shy and silent man, does all in his power to help him. He appoints him as his private secretary, and lavishes kindness on him, but the young man, who wears a green patch over his eye, is utterly wanting in gratitude, and pesters the young wife with his attentions. How husband and wife in the end become united must be left for the author to tell.

New 6s. Novels.

Max

By **KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON**

Author of "John Chilcote, M.P.," "The Gambler," etc.

With eight illustrations by Frank Craig.

It is anticipated that Mrs. Thurston's new novel "Max" will arrest the interest of the public even more definitely than did her previous books "John Chilcote, M.P." and "The Gambler;" for while being a study of character, it yet possesses the accumulative interest and sense of a story that marks her earlier work. Like "John Chilcote, M.P." it deals with a masquerade, but one planned upon entirely different lines, for it is the heroine and not the hero who masquerades. In this book Mrs. Thurston breaks new ground, having laid her scenes in Paris—on the heights of Montmartre.

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A Romance in Touraine

By **MAY CROMMELIN**

Author of "Lovers on the Green," etc.

"Madam Mystery" opens in home scenery. A young heroine living in a manor house among Devon moorlands is failing under family cares and ordered abroad for a change. Next she is one of a gay young party enjoying sightseeing among the castles of the Loire where they fall in love—fall out; puzzled all the while by a personage calling herself by the heroine's name. This will-o'-the-wisp double constantly precedes or follows them, refusing to explain her existence or to be met. In the end this hide and seek game ends by the lady being caught after she is becoming dangerous. Who is she? the novel might be called. Who she *is* brings the merry hunt among the Touraine castles to a satisfactory end.

This Son of Adam

By **G. B. BURGIN**

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," etc.

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Author of "The Light Invisible," "The Conventionalists," etc.

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